THE PATH TO UNIVERSITY ADMISSION IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, university-based Intensive English Programs (IEPs) have expanded to serve the growing population of international students who wish to earn their degrees at U.S. universities. Many of these IEPs have shifted their focus to assist these academically bound international students by functioning as a bridge to enrollment in American undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Accordingly, it has become increasingly important to investigate and better understand how such programs are serving this student population. This dissertation explores how one university-based IEP is preparing its academically bound international students for their subsequent academic studies. In order to gain greater insight into students' experiences throughout the college-going process, current and former students were interviewed about the ways in which this IEP facilitated their admittance to, enrollment in, and academic readiness for success in university degree programs. Additionally, interviews with instructors and administrators, observations of IEP courses and advising sessions, and student test score and academic record data were all analyzed to gain a more holistic understanding of the processes these students undergo in the pursuit of their academic goals. This study draws upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning as a theoretical framework to examine the academic socialization that international students studying at a university-based IEP experience throughout the college-going process. The findings from this study revealed that in addition to English language instruction, university-based IEPs with academically bound student populations must also provide their students with the college choice support and academic readiness skills necessary to achieve their goals. By conducting an in-depth analysis of one university-based IEP, this dissertation offers concrete implications that IEP

administrators and instructors can enact in order to better support their students throughout the university applications and admissions processes, while providing these students with the linguistic and academic skills necessary for ultimate success in their undergraduate or graduate degree program.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to Ollie and Teddy—

For your boundless love and inspiration.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Each year, a growing number of students from around the world have made the monumental decision to study at higher education institutions in the United States. By the 2015/2016 academic year, the international student population in the United States had reached a record high of 1,043,839 international students, representing 5.2% of the total number of students enrolled in American institutions of higher education (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2016). However, international students are often not prepared to apply for and attend undergraduate or graduate degree programs directly upon arrival from their home countries. Instead, many international students decide to first attend a non-degree program to improve their English language abilities and help them prepare for the university applications and admissions process. In fact, 8.2% of all international students studying in the United States this past year were enrolled in non-degree programs (IIE, 2016).

As an administrator and instructor in one such non-degree program—a university-based intensive English program (IEP)—I interact with this population of academically bound international students on a daily basis. In the recent past, few students had enrolled in our intensive program with the explicit purpose of preparing for and pursuing their higher education aspirations in the United States. Most of the students in our program in the early 2000s were studying English for more communicative and

functional purposes (e.g., improving language skills for the workplace, improving job opportunities, learning about American culture, etc.). However, more and more international students are now using IEPs as a stepping-stone to help them gain admission to matriculated degree programs at American institutions (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). This shift in student aims has been dramatic within our IEP population. According to an in-house survey of students enrolled in this IEP, 77% of our students now plan to attend an undergraduate (41%) or graduate (36%) degree program at an American university (Intensive English Program survey, 2015). Additionally, these survey results indicated that another 4% of IEP students hoped to attend an English speaking university outside of the U.S. and 9% planned to complete their university degree in their home country. Altogether, 90% of the IEP students who responded to this survey in the fall of 2015 cited academic goals as their reason for studying in the program.

Despite these lofty academic aspirations, I have continually been astounded by the mismatch between students' goals and the reality of the U.S. university applications and admissions process. Students often arrive to our program with the expectation of transitioning into a matriculated undergraduate or graduate degree program in an extremely short period of time. Nonetheless, many of these same students enter this IEP with elementary levels of English and very little knowledge of American academia or the university application process. The expectation of beginning an undergraduate or graduate degree program within six months of arriving at an American IEP is simply unrealistic for the majority of these students. In consequence, instructors and administrators at IEPs such as this one have been tasked with the immense challenge of

addressing students' idealistic academic goals and expectations, while facilitating their preparation for matriculated degree studies.

Problem Statement

IEPs are currently faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of a growing population of academically bound international students who require support throughout the university applications and admissions process. As noted above, many of these students expect their IEP courses to provide them with all of the skills necessary to gain admission to and, subsequently, to succeed in the university program of their choice. Numerous IEPs have attempted to respond to this shift in student goals by adapting their curriculum to become more academically focused and providing students with additional services to assist them in gaining university admission (Basturkmen, 2009; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). In response to this change in student needs, IEPs have moved the content of their curriculum away from general English and towards English for academic purposes (EAP) courses in order to provide students with the academic skills and literacies necessary to cope with the demands of the university classroom (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). In order to accomplish this curricular sea change, many IEPs have invested a great deal of time and energy in the development of EAP courses; however, it is not entirely clear how successful these EAP courses have been in preparing students for their subsequent university coursework.

In addition to these substantial curricular modifications, many IEPs (e.g., Boston University, University of California-Irvine, University of Delaware, University of Pennsylvania) have expanded their staff to include full-time advisors and/or college

counselors in an attempt to better support their students through the application and admissions process. These specialized staff members offer courses, workshops, and one-on-one advising sessions to support students throughout the college-going process. Despite these modifications and adaptations to curriculum and the addition of the aforementioned support services, IEP instructors and administrators continue to struggle with the ways in which they can best assist these students in achieving their academic goals. Little, if any, recent research has investigated the changing needs of this specific population of students and thus, it is unclear as to how well IEPs are actually supporting students in their quest to gain admittance to American universities. How many of these students are actually admitted to American universities? Are these students able to gain acceptance to the university of their choice or are they instead settling for any program that will accept them? What specialized supports do these students need as they engage in the applications and admissions process? How long does it take these students to gain acceptance to and subsequently, enroll in an American university? How well equipped for success are these students once they leave the IEP and enroll in their matriculated degree program? These are important questions that need to be explored if IEPs aspire to serve this population of students to the fullest extent possible. Moreover, research is needed to examine the extent to which these English language programs have prepared those students who do manage to enroll in undergraduate or graduate degree programs in the United States for academic success. Although this dissertation cannot address all of these colossal issues in one fell swoop, it will begin the inquiry into the role that IEPs play in helping students to achieve their academic goals.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the ways in which an IEP was meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. In order to achieve this goal, this dissertation employed an in-depth, qualitative case study approach to analyze the process of academic socialization that this student population underwent from their initial enrollment in the IEP to their matriculation and attendance in undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Interviews were conducted in order to examine international students' expectations, aspirations, and experiences at different points throughout the college-going process. By investigating two different subsets of international students, I was able to explore the ways in which these perceptions changed over time, while examining the factors that influenced students' ability to navigate the applications and admissions process. In addition, students who had succeeded in transitioning from the IEP to a matriculated degree program were interviewed in order to investigate the extent to which their IEP courses provided them with the preparation necessary for success in their university coursework. Further, these students were questioned about how well equipped they felt when they entered their subsequent degree program and what the IEP could have done differently to have better prepared them for their university coursework and ultimate academic success.

In order to gain a holistic understanding of the role that this IEP played in preparing these students, I conducted student, instructor, and administrator interviews, as well as advising session and classroom observations. Additionally, I collected student transcript and test score data from all student participants and analyzed internal program

evaluation survey results to situate the participants' perspectives in the context of larger IEP. Through the collection of these multiple data sources, I was able to explore the roles that the various stakeholders played in supporting the needs of this specific population of students throughout the applications, admissions, and enrollment processes.

As more and more international students decide to pursue degrees in undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States, it has become increasingly important to investigate and better understand this growing student population. Many international students who do not yet have the language proficiency and/or academic readiness necessary to gain admittance to the degree program of their choice rely on American IEPs to help them achieve their academic goals. However, we know very little about how such IEPs are supporting these students throughout the applications and admissions process, while at the same time facilitating their academic socialization and readiness. By conducting an in-depth analysis of one university-based IEP that was serving this specific population of international students, I have begun to identify the program features and supports that were most useful to these students throughout their college-going journey. In doing so, I have identified opportunities for reexamining the ways in which such IEPs provide support and instruction to their academically bound students. Additionally, this dissertation offers concrete implications that IEP administrators and instructors can enact in order to better support their students throughout the university applications and admissions process. These implications suggest ways in which IEPs can provide their students with the linguistic and academic

readiness skills necessary for ultimate success in their undergraduate or graduate degree programs.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study offers an in-depth analysis of one IEP in the attempt to address the following research questions:

1. What role do IEPs play in the academic socialization of international students throughout the university applications, admissions, and enrollment processes?
2. What supports do IEPs provide students during the applications and admissions process and how closely aligned is this support with students' needs and expectations?
3. How well do IEPs prepare international students for their transition into matriculated undergraduate and graduate degree programs?

Dissertation Overview

This introductory chapter has presented the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, and significance of this dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a review of the extant literature on the role of IEPs, academic socialization and success, research on IEPs in international contexts, and the gap in the research, while also presenting situated learning theory as the theoretical framework that guides this study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of this dissertation by describing the research design, site, participants, the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as a discussion of the researcher's position. The next three chapters provide a thematic exploration of the findings; with Chapter 4 focusing on academic socialization, Chapter 5 describing the

findings surrounding the support received during the applications and admissions process, and Chapter 6 detailing the academic preparation of students at this IEP. Chapter 7 presents an overall discussion of the findings as they relate to college choice process support and the facilitation of linguistic and academic readiness through the theoretical framework of situated learning. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation with a presentation of the study's conclusions, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction to the Literature Review

This chapter situates this dissertation in the context of the relevant research in the field by providing an overview of the literature related to the academic preparation and socialization of academically bound international students and particularly, the part that American IEPs play in that process. I first describe the role of IEPs in international students' pursuit of matriculated degree study at American universities. The chapter continues with a discussion of academic socialization and success, focusing more specifically on the role of language proficiency, the adjustment that international students must undergo, and students' preparation for university coursework. In the next section of the chapter, I provide an overview of the extant research that has been conducted on IEPs' roles in international contexts. This is followed by an explanation of the gap in the research. I conclude this chapter by presenting the theoretical framework of situated learning theory and discuss how it is applied here to the process of academic socialization that international students at one IEP undertake.

The IEP as a Path to the American University

In recent years, university-based IEPs have continued to develop and multiply in order to serve the growing number of international students who need additional linguistic and academic support as they embark upon international study in the United States (Thompson, 2013). This growth is exemplified by the membership to the

organization of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP), which now consists of 72 member programs in the United States. This is a substantial increase from the 13 original members of organization's founding in 1967. These English language programs were first developed to address the linguistic needs of English as a second language (ESL) students enrolled in their respective universities; however, universities quickly realized that these programs could also serve as a major source of revenue by increasing their student base. Consequently, many university-based IEPs expanded and began to recruit non-matriculated international students in order to increase IEP enrollments (UCIEP, 2014). These programs continued to evolve by providing English language instruction to a range of students wanting to learn English for a variety of communicative, functional, and academic purposes (e.g., providing international students with a study abroad experience, learning about American culture, improving language skills for the workplace, expanding academic opportunities, etc.). Most recently, university-based IEPs now regularly function as preparation for and a bridge to matriculated university study for a large population of international students each year (IIE, 2016).

It is important to make a distinction between the type of university-based IEPs that I am examining in this dissertation and a different program model: pathway programs that are offered to international students at some U.S. universities. Pathway programs are programs that allow international students who do not possess the standardized English language proficiency scores required for direct admission to a particular university to take a combination of intensive English courses and credit-

bearing academic courses for a period of time, generally a year, after which they will be guaranteed admission to that same university. The number of these pathway programs has surged in recent years as several large international recruiting agencies have partnered with numerous American universities to help those universities increase their international enrollments (Klahr, 2015). In contrast, the university-based IEP under examination in this dissertation is run by the university itself and does not offer any such conditional admission program. Although pathway programs have been gaining popularity and offer an alternative bridge to university study for international students, they will not be discussed further in this dissertation, as this was not the program model employed at the site under investigation.

Instead, I will focus my examination on the more traditional university-based IEPs. Friedenberg (2002) aptly describes such IEP models for academically bound international students as follows:

> Students take about 25 hours per week of intensive ESL instruction for about a year (if they enter the program with low English proficiency). They then enter an English-medium university after scoring suitably on the TOEFL or other standardized test. Sometimes English for specific purposes (ESP), EAP, or theme-based ESL is offered at advanced levels of an IEP, but generally no authentic academic text is used. There is no contact with native speakers and there is no direct progress toward a degree. (p. 312)

Although this description was written 15 years ago, Friedenberg's (2002) account remains true of most IEPs in the United States today. University-based IEPs continue to function as an intermediary step for many international students who cannot obtain direct admission to the degree program of their choice and receive no (or very little) credit for the immense amount of time, energy, and resources they must devote to their IEP courses

before gaining admission to their degree programs. Although the university-based IEP program model has its faults, the issue of how to best prepare international students who do not possess the English proficiency required for admission to selective and highly-selective institutions has yet to be resolved. Instead, this subject continues to be decidedly concerning for IEP administrators and instructors who want to support these students through their college-going process, as well as insufficiently researched in the literature.

Despite this growing trend of IEPs functioning as a gateway to American universities for international students, we know very little about the challenges faced by this specific population of students throughout the university applications and admissions process. In general, the college-going process of ESL students in the United States is a highly underresearched area of study. Moreover, the few studies that have explored ESL students' access to and attainment in higher education have not focused specifically on international students who first attend IEPs in their pursuit of admission to undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Several studies have focused on immigrant and refugee ESL students' access to and success in both community college (Harklau 1998, 1999, 2000; Harklau & Siegal, 2009) and undergraduate degree programs (Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Kanno & Grosik, 2012; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). In an attempt to more generally investigate the university practices regarding international students, Andrade, Evans, and Hartshorn (2014) conducted a comprehensive nationwide study to explore how nonnative English speakers' (NNES) are admitted, assessed (both pre- and post-admission), supported, and tracked (in terms of their progress) by American institutions.

By conducting an online survey of 138 different institutions, the researchers found that there exist "extensive gaps and inconsistencies in institutional practices for identifying, screening, supporting, and tracking NNES in higher education" (p. 220). However, Andrade et al. did not make a distinction between immigrant and international students in their survey and therefore, it is impossible to distinguish how the results of this study pertain specifically to this particular population of international students.

The lack of research on international students' paths to university study in the United States will only become more problematic as the economic and social impact of these students continues to grow with their increased enrollments in coming years. International students now have a tremendous financial impact on the United States economy as they contributed a record high of over $30.5 billion in 2015 (IIE, 2016). This number has more than doubled in the past 10 years, from $13 billion in 2005 (Andrade, 2006). Further, the economic impact of this academic revenue is particularly significant due to the fact that 72% of all international students currently "receive the majority of their funds from sources outside of the United States" (IIE, 2016).

As the economic impact of international students grows, so does the social impact of these students. According to the Institute of International Education, international students "contribute to America's scientific and technical research and bring international perspectives into U.S. classrooms, helping prepare American undergraduates for global careers, and often lead to longer-term business relationships and economic benefits" (IIE, 2016, Economic Impact of International Students section, para. 2). It is therefore becoming all the more important to investigate how IEPs are meeting the needs of this

population of students in order to gain an improved understanding of the challenges international students face when applying to and enrolling in university study. By doing so, institutions can work to increase the success of these students throughout the application, admissions, and enrollment processes. If we fail to do so, the United States may lose this important source of international revenue, knowledge, and cultural exchange.

Academic Socialization and Success

In order to understand what makes international students successful at U.S. universities, it is important to investigate how they are socialized into the American academic community. This includes the ways in which these students acquire the necessary academic discourse to fully participate in the university classroom and community. Throughout the literature, this process has been discussed on the macro level as language socialization (Duff, 1995, 2010; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), and more precisely as L2 socialization and/or academic discourse socialization (Duff, 1995, 2010; Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). These studies have demonstrated how language learners' practices, interactions, and language development are mediated by their enculturation into the academic discourse and the community of practice. Further, academic socialization studies have examined how language learners' identities and perspectives evolve as they gain expertise and develop their participation in an academic community of practice (Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015).

In this dissertation, I define *academic socialization* as the process by which international students develop the ability to participate in the university community of practice (i.e., American academia) by adjusting to new academic, linguistic, and cultural norms. This includes students' development of learning strategies and socioacademic relationships, as well as the ability to utilize academic assistance and establish academic integration. In alignment with Morita (2004), I conceptualize academic socialization as a dynamic, co-constructed process and believe it is "not simply a matter of acquiring pregiven knowledge sets of skills but involves a complex process of negotiating identities, cultures, or power relations" (pp. 574-575). By understanding academic socialization in this way, I am able to examine the agency that student participants in this dissertation enacted as they negotiated the process of academic socialization. In the following sections, I explore the literature surrounding three factors associated with the academic socialization and success of international students: (a) the role of language proficiency in international students' participation and success in American universities, (b) the process of adjustment that international students undergo as they are socialized for success in the academy, and (c) the academic and linguistic preparation that international students engage in to be able to tackle university coursework.

Role of Language Proficiency

The investigation into the relationship between language proficiency and academic success is a well-studied area of research on international students. The motivation for this research is clear: Institutions want to know what level of English proficiency is necessary for academic readiness so that they are able to select the most

suitable international students during the admissions process. Not surprisingly, many of these studies have found that there is, in fact, a relationship between language proficiency and international students' ability to succeed in their academic programs (Abel, 2002; Andrade, 2006; Johnson, 1988; Messner & Liu, 1995; Stoynoff, 1997). The question then becomes how institutions can best measure international students' language proficiency during the application and admissions process, as well as how these institutions can support those students who do not yet possess the English language necessary for academic success. The large majority of U.S. universities rely on standardized test scores (i.e. TOEFL iBT, IELTS) as their primary means of evaluating how well applicants will be able to comprehend and use English within their academic coursework (Andrade et al., 2014).

In a recent study of linguistic support in higher education, Andrade et al. (2014) found that all 138 institutions surveyed used some form of standardized testing to determine whether international students have the academic English skills necessary to be successful and consequently, gain acceptance to their institution. The survey indicated that the TOEFL iBT was the most utilized exam: 100% of respondents reported using the test for both undergraduate and graduate applicants. The use of the TOEFL was followed closely by the IELTS: 94% of institutions utilized the exam for undergraduate admissions and 88% for graduate admissions (Andrade et al., 2014). As these standardized English language assessments are given such weight in university admissions, international students are, rightfully, highly focused on their preparation for and scores received on these tests. Accordingly, many university-based IEPs offer preparation courses for these

assessments and must compete for their students' attention in other IEP courses as they prepare for these tests.

As the TOEFL remains the common gold standard in measuring international applicants' language proficiency, it is not surprising that many scholars have explored the reliability and predictability of this exam. For decades, scholars have been investigating the relationship between TOEFL scores and subsequent academic achievement at both the undergraduate (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Johnson, 1988; Stoynoff, 1997) and graduate level (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Messner & Liu, 1995). In a pivotal study conducted nearly 30 years ago, Johnson (1988) examined the correlation between the TOEFL scores and GPAs of all international undergraduate students enrolled at one public university. The results of this study indicated that the TOEFL could predict academic performance when the score required for admission was relatively low. As a result of this finding, Johnson (1988) contended that the TOEFL exam could be used as a reliable predictor for international students' subsequent academic success when institutions are evaluating students with comparatively low proficiency levels. Although the results of this study remain a highly cited source of support for the use of the TOEFL in admissions decisions, these findings are extremely limited due to the age of the study, the notion that the predictability only extends to students on the lower end of the proficiency spectrum, and the fact that the current TOEFL iBT has been considerably revised from the version that was given at the time of this study.

In addition to the research that has demonstrated the value that standardized test scores can provide institutions, many other scholars have argued that the score on a

standardized test alone cannot measure the complex relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement. In a study on the reticence of Asian students in the university classroom, Cheng (2000) aptly pointed out that for many Asian students a high score on a standardized test may not actually indicate that the student has reached the level of English proficiency necessary for success in the university classroom. According to Cheng (2000), this failure in test score reliability can be attributed to the extreme levels of test preparation (i.e., spending hundreds of hours developing test-taking strategies in "cram" schools) that many Asian students undertake. Hence, these standardized assessments of language proficiency seem to advantage certain populations of students (e.g., those schooled in a tradition of rote learning) and disadvantage others, while not always serving as an accurate indicator of ultimate academic success.

The predictive ability of the scores on standardized tests of language proficiency may also depend on the level of study that the students in question intend to undertake. In a comparative study of native and nonnative speaking students at a Canadian university, Berman and Cheng (2001) found that the predictive value of the TOEFL may actually be higher for undergraduate students than it is for graduate students. This supposition was the result of the finding that the graduate students in the study had higher overall TOEFL scores; yet lower overall GPAs than the undergraduate students. Due to the lower rates of academic success achieved by the international graduate students, Berman and Cheng (2001) argued that international undergraduate students were more able to overcome the language difficulties they faced in the university classroom. Consequently, Berman and Cheng (2001) contended that it was the international graduate

students in their study who needed more support from the university (perhaps in the form of specialized EAP instruction) in order to be academically successful.

As universities encounter more and more international students, these institutions must determine how to best support this student population once they begin their program of study. Many institutions administer an internal placement exam upon enrollment in order to decide the level of language support these students need. However, there has been an increased push to utilize standardized proficiency test scores for this purpose at many universities (Kokhan, 2012; Williams, 1995). Kokhan (2012) examined the possibility of utilizing students' scores on the TOEFL iBT, instead of administering an internal placement exam, in order to identify and place students in ESL writing courses. Although increased international student enrollments and financial constraints may force many institutions to rely on standardized test scores for placement into ESL writing courses, Kokhan found that the TOEFL might not truly be suitable for placement purposes. In particular, the results of this study indicated that when the TOEFL was taken about a year prior to the start of an academic program (as is often the case), that the score was not a reliable measure of the student's current English proficiency. Therefore, the sole reliance on standardized test scores to evaluate international students' language proficiency could be problematic for universities as this practice would likely cause institutions to admit many international students who are not actually able to demonstrate academic readiness upon enrollment.

It is important that IEP administrators and instructors understand the ways in which language proficiency is both assessed by universities, as well as how this

assessment is related to international students' subsequent academic success. Further, IEP administrators and instructors must be aware of the impact that preparing for these standardized assessments has on their academically bound students. By doing so, IEPs can better support international students throughout the application and admissions process, while also providing them with the skills necessary for ultimate academic success.

International Student Adjustment and Success

In order to fully comprehend the complexity of international students' academic success, scholars have explored the other influences, besides language proficiency, that affect international students' achievement (Abel, 2002; Andrade, 2006; Andrade et al., 2014; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Lee & Wesche, 2000). In a review of the literature, Abel (2002) found that international students' success in university is the result of a number of different factors, including "language proficiency, learning strategies, classroom dynamics, social and educational assistance (e.g., study groups, tutoring, etc.), selection of professors, and time management" (p. 18). This finding suggests that universities should not simply rely on assessments of international students' language proficiency as the sole predictor of their subsequent academic success. Instead, it is important for institutions to understand the multifaceted nature of international students' success by examining and supporting those students throughout their adjustment to study at an international university. Although not all international students enroll in IEPs prior to matriculated study, IEPs are often the first point of contact and provide support

throughout the initial adjustment period for those international students who do rely on IEPs for language development and academic preparation.

A large number of studies that explore international students' success have focused their attention on the adjustment that these students must undertake when transitioning to study at an English-speaking institution. An international student's ability to successfully adjust to the new academic, linguistic, and cultural norms they face when studying abroad often strongly dictates their ability to achieve academic success. Andrade et al. (2014) identified the following issues as those encountered during international students' adjustment: "isolation, homesickness, culture shock, lecture comprehension, academic vocabulary, classroom interaction patterns, critical analysis and synthesis of information, scholarly writing, patterns of written discourse, and the rigor of academic study" (p. 208). The adjustment concerns that international students face include those issues that domestic students must also tackle, in addition to the many issues that are unique to international students.

In her review of international student adjustment issues, Andrade (2006) found that compared to domestic students, "international students have greater adjustment difficulties and experience more stress and anxiety" (p. 143). When analyzing the reasons behind the increased difficulties faced by international students as compared to domestic students, Andrade contended that these challenges are due to a combination of international students' lack of language proficiency and limited cultural knowledge. Research has found that institutions can assist international students in managing this difficult adjustment period by providing comprehensive orientation or pre-study

programs for these students, along with continued social and cultural support throughout the duration of their program of study (Lee & Wesche, 2000). One avenue of providing such pre-program adjustment support for international students is through university-based IEPs. By ensuring that those international students who are enrolled in IEPs are provided with the necessary cultural and linguistic resources during their IEP studies, universities should be able to decrease the adjustment difficulties faced by that segment of the international student population and accordingly, increase the likelihood of their ultimate academic success.

In addition to the research focusing specifically on international student adjustment issues, other researchers have examined the participation and academic success of immigrant and international students in postsecondary education more broadly (Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Leki, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Spack, 1997; Straker, 2016; Zamel, 1995). In her longitudinal case study of four undergraduate students, Leki (2007) examined the experiences of these students from their initial enrollment in their undergraduate program to the end of their degree studies. The findings of this study revealed that students' academic success was closely linked to the development of socioacademic relationships and social nets of academic assistance that served as support structures for these students during their time at university. Mamiseishvili (2012) adopted a quantitative approach to the examination of international student persistence through the analysis of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/06) data set. In alignment with Leki's (2007) conclusion, the results of this study similarly indicated that academic integration (i.e., participation in study groups, peer

interactions about coursework, attending academic advising, etc.) had a positive effect on the persistence of international undergraduate students. These findings highlight the important role students' socioacademic relationships and academic integration play in academic success. Accordingly, IEPs should look for ways to foster this type of academic engagement among their students so that these programs can provide their students with the skills needed to develop such academic networks when they subsequently enroll in their degree programs.

Preparation for University Coursework

In order to attain academic success, international students require a wide range of linguistic and academic support in preparation for and maintenance of their academic coursework in English. With a strong academic background and high level of English proficiency, some international students possess the academic readiness to enter directly into their undergraduate or graduate degree program of choice. However, many other international students do not have the language proficiency and/or academic knowhow necessary to immediately gain admittance to or achieve success in their desired program of study. These students must receive language support prior to the start of their degree program—either in an English language program in their native country or in an American IEP—and may continue to receive support while they move into their degree studies at the university of their choice. Hyland (2006) describes the needs of such students as follows:

> Course providers have recognized that teaching those who are using English for their studies differs from teaching those who are learning English for other purposes, and programmes designed to prepare non-

> native users of English for English medium academic settings have grown into a multi-million-dollar enterprise around the world. For many learners, their first taste of academic study is through an EAP pre-sessional course, either in their home or in an overseas country. These courses are designed to improve students' academic communication skills in English to the level required for entry into an English-medium university or college. (p. 4)

As IEPs are receiving an increasing number of these academically bound students, they are tasked with providing instruction that helps prepare these students for their subsequent academic success.

In order to help students achieve their academic goals, many IEPs have shifted their curriculum away from general English language instruction towards *English for academic purposes (EAP)*. EAP can be defined as "specialized English-language teaching grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistic demands of academic target situations, providing focused instruction informed by an understanding of texts and the constraints of academic contexts" (Hyland, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, the primary goal of EAP instruction is to give academically bound students the linguistic and cultural skills necessary to become successful participants in and consumers of academic discourse. In this way, EAP courses serve as a concrete resource aimed at supporting international students' academic socialization. In order to achieve this lofty goal, EAP courses must focus on simultaneously developing students' language proficiency, while teaching them the academic skills needed engage in university coursework. EAP instructors must therefore provide students with opportunities to practice academic tasks such as listening to lectures, developing note taking skills, implementing reading strategies to tackle academic texts, conducting research, and writing academic papers (Lee & Subtirelu,

2015). By simulating these academic tasks in the language classroom, EAP courses are intended to help students prepare for the challenges of university coursework in a well-supported, lower-stress environment.

There is a long and continuing debate over how institutions can best provide EAP instruction to international students in preparation for and support of the demands they will face throughout their university studies. Over 20 years ago, Leki and Carson (1994) conducted a survey of ESL students in university-based EAP courses (i.e. an ESL section of a first-year composition course or an EAP writing course offered by an IEP) that found there to be major discrepancies between the writing instruction and assignment types given in students' ESL courses and the actual writing that they were subsequently assigned in other disciplinary courses. More specifically, the EAP composition courses were found to focus much more heavily on personal topics and emphasized the form of students' writing, while the accuracy of the content tended to be ignored (Leki & Carson, 1997). This was in stark contrast to the disciplinary writing these students later encountered in their academic courses. Therefore, Leki and Carson (1997) argued for EAP composition courses to shift to text-based writing assignments that required students to provide in-depth interpretations of different topics. The importance of requiring students to complete assignments that integrate reading and writing continues to be discussed within the field as researchers still deliberate over the best way to accomplish this integrated learning (Ferris, 2009; Grabe & Shang, 2013; Li & Casanave, 2012). Despite the numerous studies that have identified strategies for teaching EAP writing, EAP instructors continue to struggle with the techniques, methods, and tasks they should

provide learners to ensure their readiness for the wide variety of academic writing they will encounter across the curriculum.

Situated within this much larger, ongoing debate over the extent to which EAP courses can adequately prepare ESL students for the linguistic and academic demands they will face in their discipline-specific courses is the critique of the value and utility of EAP instruction received in IEPs. Friedenberg (2002) criticized the quality of EAP instruction offered by the majority of IEPs, claiming that these courses were often superficial in nature and did not go into the level of depth necessary. Instead of such ineffective EAP instruction offered at IEPs, Friedenberg argued that EAP instruction "should involve sustained content in the students' chosen disciplines and be closely coordinated with the content of the credit-bearing academic courses in which the students are concurrently enrolled" (p. 321). In this article, Friedenberg proposed the radical notion of completely abandoning the IEP format and shifting to a model in which international students would receive EAP instruction and supported academic instruction (i.e. translation and sheltered supports) while simultaneously enrolled in their degree programs. This adjunct model of paired courses that Friedenberg is proposing is not actually new to the EAP/ESP literature. In fact, Benesch actually presented a critique of the adjunct, paired course model in a 1992 article. In that article, Benesch likewise proposed an alternative model that would have ESL and content course faculty work together to create the content of the ESL curriculum. However, what was new in Friedenberg's proposal is the manner and context in which she was suggesting the paired course model be implemented. In her 2002 article, Friedenberg claimed that even

beginning level language learners should enroll directly in degree programs and that by first studying in language programs students are simply delaying their academic progress. Although this romanticized concept of concurrent language support could potentially work under the ideal conditions, it is highly unlikely that any university would be able to provide its international students the level of support necessary to make this model feasible on a large scale. Further, demonstration of English language proficiency has long been a basic eligibility requirement, which few universities would be willing to abandon in favor of this approach.

The notion that universities should eliminate all reliance on IEPs for the preparation of international students is extreme and rather misguided; however, the fact remains that many IEPs could greatly improve the quality of EAP instruction that they provide their students. In an investigation of the academic listening and speaking skills necessary for university coursework, Ferris and Tagg (1996) found that EAP instructors needed to better prepare their students for the interactive nature and expectations of the American university classroom. Specifically, Ferris and Tagg (1996) discovered that EAP classes did not contain the same level of rigor and authenticity as was evident in the listening and speaking tasks in the university classroom. This lack of authenticity was echoed in Lee and Subtirelu's (2015) study of the metadiscourse employed in EAP lessons as compared to that of general university lectures. This study found that EAP instructors relied much more heavily on metadiscourse markers (e.g., hedges, boosters, code glosses, etc.) than did university lecturers. In other words, "EAP teachers utilize linguistic expressions to explicitly signal engagement with learners more frequently,

unlike university lecturers whose main charge is to help students gain disciplinary knowledge" (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015, p. 61). Accordingly, EAP instructors utilize more metadiscourse in the classroom in order to be able to encourage interaction and make academic content more accessible to international students. At the same time, by scaffolding their discourse in this manner, EAP instructors are not accurately preparing their students for the challenging nature of genuine university lectures. The same inauthenticity was witnessed in ESL reading textbooks, which were found to be unrepresentative of authentic university textbooks and to provide less exposure to vocabulary from the academic word list than was found in the university textbooks (Miller, 2011).

In order for IEPs to provide EAP instruction that truly prepares international students for their university coursework, the vast majority of IEPs will need to increase the rigor and authenticity of their EAP courses. Many concrete instructional practices have been identified throughout the literature, which have been suggested to offer the level of EAP instruction necessary to prepare international students for genuine university coursework. These practices include focusing instruction on academic word list vocabulary (Miller, 2011); using authentic university texts that incorporate the wide range of registers found in university coursework (Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, & Helt, 2002); providing strategies for appropriately engaging in class discussions (e.g., asking and answering questions, tools to actively engage in class participation, etc.), simulating classroom lectures, offering opportunities to interact with native speakers, and providing explicit instruction on American discourse patterns in the university classroom (Ferris &

Tagg, 1996). Further, researchers have proposed that EAP instructors should educate themselves on the linguistic patterns of the university classroom by attending pre-and in-service teacher training and/or observation of university lectures so that they are better equipped to assist students in their EAP courses (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). By engaging in such professional development and enacting the aforementioned instructional practices, research has suggested that IEP instructors can make strides toward providing international students with the type of EAP instruction needed for subsequent academic success. Nonetheless, the extent to which such recommendations have been implemented at IEPs is unclear and more research is needed to examine how EAP instruction is actually being enacted on the ground.

IEPs in International Contexts

Despite the mounting importance of the international student population in this country, few, if any, published studies have specifically examined the college-going processes of international students in the context of American IEPs in recent years. However, there has been a modest amount of research on this topic in international contexts. Several scholars have conducted studies on the impact of English language programs on international students' subsequent university study in other English-speaking countries, including Canada (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox, 2005, 2009; Fox, Cheng, & Zumbo, 2014; Lee & Wesche, 2000), the United Kingdom (Banerjee & Wall, 2006), and Australia (Moore & Morton, 2005; Phakiti, Hirsh, & Woodrow, 2013). In one such study of Canadian international students, Lee and Wesche (2000) focused specifically on the adaptation of Korean students to IEPs and degree programs at three

institutions (i.e. two universities and one community college) in Ottawa. The findings of this study indicated that the participants enrolled in IEPs at these institutions had made more rapid gains in their English proficiency and confidence than had the Korean students who were enrolled in degree programs at these same institutions. In addition, Lee and Wesche (2000) contended that IEPs helped students develop their social networks, which, in turn, allowed them to be more successful in their language learning and adjustment to study in an international program. However, the implications of this study are extremely limited as Lee and Wesche (2000) investigated such a specific population of students—all study participants were of the same nationality, were enrolled in one of three local institutions, and were engaged in their first semester of study abroad—and conducted this research nearly 15 years ago.

In another more current study, Fox, Cheng, and Zumbo (2014) explored the impact of English language programs on international students' academic and social engagement in Canadian universities. Through a survey of 641 L2 students enrolled in ESL and/or EAP programs at 26 different Canadian universities, Fox et al. (2014) discovered that both types of programs had a positive impact on the students' engagement at university. Further, the researchers suggested that these English language programs do make a substantial difference in easing the students' transition to matriculated university study. This study built upon Fox's previous research on admissions requirements for nonnative speakers (Fox, 2005), the role of EAP instruction in international students' acculturation to Canadian universities (Cheng & Fox, 2008), and the diagnostic assessment of and EAP curricular reform for international students

(Fox, 2009). Despite the knowledge that Fox and his colleagues have gained from investigating the admissions and enrollment processes of the international student population in Canada for nearly 10 years, they argue that there is still a great deal to be learned about these students. According to Fox et al. (2014), there remains "a pressing need to systematically investigate and further clarify the relationship between language support program emphasis, students' personal characteristics, and successful transition to university study" (p. 78).

Another recent study on international students' English language proficiency and academic success was Phakiti et al.'s (2013) investigation of international students in Australia. Phakiti et al. (2013) focused specifically on the direct entry pathway to undergraduate study in an Australian university by examining data on international students in their final semester of a Foundation Studies program. Through the investigation of a personal factors questionnaire and student grade data, the researchers found that a complex interplay of personal factors (i.e. self-regulation, self-efficacy, motivation, academic difficulty, and personal factors) impact international students' language development and academic readiness. They thus argued that "English language proficiency is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success of international students" (Phakiti et al., 2013, p. 250). Once again, the findings of this study are limited by the fact that the data were collected within the context of a specific direct entry path program for undergraduate students at one Australian university. Although this study lays an important foundation in the research of international students' pathways to university study, further research is needed to explore other entry pathways that more

heterogeneous populations of international students take in their pursuit of university study in English speaking countries.

Research Gap

The linguistic and academic preparation that many international students seek prior to enrolling in their matriculated degree program is now frequently provided by university-based IEPs. More and more IEPs are currently functioning as a bridge to enrollment in undergraduate or graduate degree programs in the United States (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). When institutions do not have conditional admittance policies, these IEPs must prepare students for the applications and admissions process at a wide range of external universities. Although academic and admissions preparation is now an integral function of American IEPs, there has been a paucity of research exploring this phenomenon and the respective needs of this specific international student population. Very little, if any, formal research has explored the ways in which IEPs support these international students as they strive to gain university admittance and enrollment in the United States. This study attempts to fill this gap in research by conducting an in-depth analysis of the paths that international students take from their initial enrollment at an IEP to their acceptance and ensuing attendance in undergraduate or graduate degree programs at American universities. More specifically, I investigate the ways in which one institution is meeting the needs of this international student population by examining how various instructors and administrators within the IEP assist students during these processes, the extent to which this assistance is meeting the students' expectations, and the ultimate success that these students are achieving in meeting their academic goals.

In order to attain academic success, international students must successfully adjust to the new academic, linguistic, and cultural norms that they encounter when they enroll in an American university. Nonetheless, this process of academic socialization has been found to be more challenging for international students than it is for their domestic peers (Andrade, 2006). In response to increasing international student enrollments, universities have taken on a variety of approaches to help prepare and support international students. In their recent survey of U.S. institutions, Andrade et al. (2014) found that most schools took a "traditional support approach" (p. 219) to international students with required coursework and optional support services, including tutoring, writing centers, etc. However, only half of the institutions surveyed conducted post admissions placement testing, which makes it likely that a large number of international students in need of additional academic and linguistic support were not identified to receive these provisions (Andrade et al., 2014). In fact, lack of academic support was identified as the greatest weakness in university practices regarding international students (Andrade et al., 2014). As the support that international students receive once they are enrolled in their degree programs has been found to often be severely lacking, it is even more important to investigate the academic and linguistic preparation that these students receive prior to enrollment in an undergraduate or graduate degree program.

When investigating the international student population, several scholars have explored the role of EAP instruction in preparing students for university study and have provided critiques of the ways in which IEPs provide such EAP instruction (Biber et al., 2002; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Friedenberg, 2002; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015; Miller, 2011).

These scholars have identified some concrete practices that IEP instructors can employ in order to improve the EAP instruction that they provide to their academically bound students. Nonetheless, this research needs to be expanded to include qualitative in-depth interviews that can shed light on the ways in which IEPs are attempting to address the emerging needs of their academically bound students. In addition, scholars must consider students' perspectives when examining the ways in which IEPs could deliver quality EAP instruction that would better prepare these students for academic success in their university coursework.

Importantly, IEPs have been found to play an integral role in international students' adjustment to university study (Abel, 2002; Andrade, 2006; Andrade et al., 2014; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Lee & Wesche, 2000). IEPs frequently serve as the first point of contact and support in international students' adjustment process. Research has begun to explore the role that IEPs play in supporting international students and helping them cope with the adjustment difficulties they face when enrolling in American institutions; however, further research is needed to more extensively explore how IEPs can assist in the adjustment process and increase the likelihood of international students' academic success. We already know that IEPs often function as a supportive environment in which international students can develop important academic and social networks (Lee & Wesche, 2000). Yet, we know little about how well those IEPs are preparing their students for the challenges they will face in their subsequent studies. Therefore, research is needed to explore the unique needs that international students face

when transitioning from the security of IEPs to the much larger social environments of their matriculated undergraduate or graduate degree programs.

International students make an important economic and social impact on the United States, which is likely to grow as international student enrollments, hopefully, continue to increase (IIE, 2016). These economic and social benefits do not end at the university, as many newly graduated international students choose to remain in the United States once their degrees are completed. Such professional migration is referred to as *brain gain* for the countries, such as the U.S., who are receiving these skilled professionals (Gu & Canagarajah, 2017). Despite their important presence in American academia and U.S. society in general, there is limited data available on the access, retention, achievement, and persistence of international students as a general student subgroup (Andrade et al. 2014). Even less is known about the specific population of international students who first attend IEPs in preparation for their university study in the United States. Scholars in international contexts such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia have explored the role that English language programs play in international students' subsequent university study (Banerjee & Wall, 2006; Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox, 2005, 2009; Fox et al., 2014; Lee & Wesche, 2000; Moore & Morton, 2005; Phakiti et al., 2013); however, there has been a shortage of similar studies in the context of American IEPs. As a result, there is a pronounced need for research on the ways in which IEPs in the United States are preparing international students for university study in this country.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning in order to investigate the academic socialization that international students studying at a university-based IEP undergo throughout the university application, admissions, and enrollment processes. The development of this process-oriented theory emerged out of "an attempt to rethink learning in social, cultural, and historical terms" (Lave, 1991, p. 64). Consequently, the theoretical perspective of socially situated learning emphasizes the interrelationships between the learner and her identity, agency, cognition, and knowledge (Lave, 1991). Situated learning theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for this investigation as it has provided me with a lens through which I could analyze the process of academic socialization that these students undertook while they engaged in the college-going process. This conceptual framework allows the learning that occurred at the IEP under investigation to be understood in social terms, with the identity of the learner and their participation at the center of this understanding (Wenger, 2009).

Lave and Wenger (1991) contended that not only is learning social in nature, but that learning is the process of one's social participation in a *community of practice*. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), a community of practice can be understood as a group of people who are engaged in a co-participatory process of shared learning. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) have worked to create a slightly more tangible definition of the notion: "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they

interact regularly" (p. 1). It is the learner's engagement in the community's social interactions that allows that learner to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge necessary to later fully participate in the community of practice. For example, a midwife develops mastery of her craft through an apprenticeship and/or practicum as she engages in interaction with other midwives in the field (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this theoretical perspective, learning is inextricably tied to participation and the situated context in which that participation occurs. By viewing learning as a socially situated process, this theory has provided me with a framework to analyze the role that the social context of learning plays in students' experiences while studying at an IEP and their ultimate success in becoming full-fledged members of the American academic community.

Central to Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning is the notion of *legitimate peripheral participation*. In any community of practice, Lave and Wenger claim that there is a continuum of participation, as each community includes multiple levels of involvement. Therefore, participants in a given community of practice may be categorized as follows: the core group of members, followed by the active participants, occasional participants, peripheral participants, and transactional (outside) participants. The borders between these different participant groups are generally quite flexible and dynamic, with community members moving in and out of the above categories over time or within different community-based activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The periphery of a community of practice is often, but certainly not always, the entry point for community members, as it allows newcomers or participants who have not yet committed extensively

to that community of practice a legitimate form of membership in the community. Wenger (1998) argued that this legitimacy is essential if newcomers are to be able to gain access to the learning that occurs in the community and to be viewed as potential community members. However, not all learners receive the same level of legitimacy in each community of practice. The level of legitimacy that participants receive depends on the power relations existent in that community of practice and the ways in which the community organizes access to its knowledge and resources. As a result, a newcomer's legitimate peripheral participation is a continual process of negotiation for peripheral participants, as conflicts and power struggles arise within inherently dynamic communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In addition to the focus on the legitimate participation that occurs at the periphery of a learning community, situated learning theory also puts forth the notion that learning can transpire at the boundary of a community of practice. By acknowledging the boundaries that exist between communities of practice, this theoretical framework provides a means of examining learning systems not only as they exist in isolation, but also as they relate to other communities of practice. In this way, the interactions and connections that learners engage in within the boundaries between communities of practice are conceptualized as meaningful learning opportunities in their own right (Wenger, 2000). Further, Wenger theorized that brokering occurs at these boundaries as individuals help to transport knowledge and learning from one community of practice to another. These conceptualizations of community boundaries and brokers are particularly useful in understanding the IEP community of practice in relation to the general

university system. According to Wenger (2000), boundaries can be sources of both opportunities and challenges within the "constellations of interrelated communities of practice" (p. 229) that make up a larger learning system.

Situated learning theory has been utilized in a variety of disciplines (e.g., anthropology, education, cultural psychology, etc.) in order to examine a wide range of different social contexts (e.g., workplaces, schools, support groups, social organizations, etc.). Researchers in the fields of second language acquisition and language education have drawn heavily upon the notions of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation in their analysis of various language learning contexts, including ESL classes in the K-12 setting (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000; Toohey, 1998), community-based language classes (Finn, 2010; Han, 2009; Norton, 2001), and university programs (Belcher, 1994; Flowerdew, 2000; Giroir, 2014; Leki, 2001; Morita, 2004). In the case of the university community of practice, the process of legitimate peripheral participation allows newcomers a means of becoming "increasingly competent in academic ways of knowing, speaking, and writing as they participate peripherally and legitimately in academic practices" (Morita, 2004, p. 576).

In recent years, IEPs have increasingly functioned as a way for international students to gain access to and increase their involvement in the American university community. By taking this academic path, international students who do not yet possess the language proficiency or academic knowhow necessary to enroll in the undergraduate or graduate degree program of their choice are able to engage in legitimate peripheral participation in the larger university community of practice through their IEP studies.

However, it is important to consider the fact that IEPs, along with the program administrators and instructors who teach in these university-based ESL programs, have long been marginalized within the larger university context (Thompson, 2013; Williams, 1995). The marginalized status of IEPs within the academic community can be in large part attributed to the differentiated academic roles of ESL instructors, who are often in non-tenure track positions, do not possess doctoral degrees, and are not held to the publication requirements most faculty members face (Thompson, 2013). International students enrolled in IEPs are consequently accorded unequal status within the university, as they are not (yet) enrolled in a matriculated, credit-bearing degree program (Williams, 1995). Nonetheless, the academic participation these students engage in while enrolled in an IEP allows them to, at times, "touch" the larger university community of practice. Such peripheral participation occurs when IEP students participate in university events, interact with university students, and/or enroll in credit-bearing courses. In this way, the IEP can broker international students' interaction with other university discourse communities and facilitate student learning through these boundary encounters (Wenger, 2000). Additionally, the IEP, in many ways, replicates the larger university community and is designed to prepare these students for their subsequent entry into an undergraduate or graduate degree program. Thus, university-based IEPs themselves can be conceptualized as the context for the legitimate peripheral participation of many international students. The central purpose of this study is to investigate the role that one IEP played in supporting its international students' ability to successfully gain admittance to and enroll in university degree programs. By employing a situated learning

perspective, I am able to theoretically analyze the process of academic socialization that these students undertake as they participate in an IEP in preparation for their subsequent university studies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a description of the research design and methodology that were employed in this study. I will first describe the research design of this study and my rationale for conducting a qualitative case study in the exploration of academically bound international students at one IEP. The chapter continues with a description of the research site and the study participants. In the next section of the chapter, I then provide an account of the data collection and procedures. This is followed by an explanation of the data analysis. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of my position as both a researcher and administrator at the site of investigation, while presenting an explanation of the data's authenticity and trustworthiness in light of this positioning.

Research Design

For this dissertation, I conducted a qualitative case study to explore the academic participation, engagement, and socialization that occurred throughout the university applications, admissions, and enrollment processes in which international students at one IEP were engaged. A case study is the examination of complex social phenomenon with the purpose of investigating what can be learned from that single case (Stake, 2005). This is a case study of not one individual student or instructor or course, but rather, the case under examination in this dissertation is that of one organization: the IEP in question. In this way, this case study is likewise able to function as a program evaluation of this individual IEP by capturing the challenges, beliefs, and diverse experiences unique

to participants within this organization (Patton, 2002). Moreover, employing a qualitative case study approach has allowed me to not only provide an in-depth and detailed analysis specific to the context of this IEP, but to also identify important implications that can be applied by instructors and administrators at other IEPs with similar student populations.

As the principal aim of this study was to better understand students', instructors', and administrators' experiences as they engaged in the preparation and support involved in the college-going process, in-depth qualitative interviews with the aforementioned participant groups were chosen to be the primary data source for this dissertation. Focusing my attention on interview data allowed me to capture the participants' emic perspectives on their lived experiences, while engaging in inquiry into the meaning that these individuals have made from those experiences (Patton, 2002). Thus, I have taken a constructivist approach to this qualitative inquiry by studying the "multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 96).

Because the path to university admission can be a lengthy process for international students—from initial enrollment in an IEP to their eventual university enrollment (and ultimate attainment) at the end of their journey—I wanted to capture students' perspectives at various points throughout the college-going process to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Ideally, this objective would have been achieved by conducting a longitudinal study in which I interviewed the same students at numerous moments in time throughout their academic journeys.

Unfortunately, time constraints associated with my dissertation deadline did not allow such a longitudinal design approach to be an option. As the next best alternative, I decided to interview students at different stages throughout this process, thus adopting a crosssectional approach to the interviewing of student participants. In order to implement this approach, I had initially intended to investigate three subgroups of students: (a) newly arrived students at lower levels of proficiency, (b) actively applying students at higher levels of proficiency, and (c) former students who had matriculated into undergraduate or graduate degree programs. However, when I began recruiting and interviewing students in the first two identified subgroups, I encountered a fundamental roadblock. I discovered that the distinction between these two subgroups of currently enrolled students was not so easy to delineate. This was because many newly arrived students actually entered the IEP at higher levels of proficiency and accordingly, became actively engaged in the applications process immediately upon their arrival to the IEP. As a result of this discovery, I took advantage of the flexibility of emergent design and decided to merge the first and second subgroups into one (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the student participants were ultimately divided into two subgroups: (a) currently enrolled students who were planning to soon apply or were actively engaged in the application process and (b) former students who had matriculated into undergraduate or graduate degree programs. In this way, I adapted the crosssectional approach to the investigation of this population of international students to be both more simplistic, while at the same time also more open to the unique and divergent nature of the paths these students take in the college-going process.

Although I was confident that interviews with instructors, administrators, and the two subgroups of students would serve as a valuable source of data, I likewise knew that it was important to use multiple data collection techniques. According to Patton (2002), such triangulation of data sources is an important means of increasing the "accuracy and credibility of findings" (p. 93). Therefore, I also conducted observations of one-on-one advising sessions, workshops, and IEP courses to more fully comprehend the participants' experiences and their beliefs about those experiences. In addition to this interview and observational data, I collected data on the scores student participants received on standardized proficiency exams (TOEFL iBT and IELTS) and in-house placement and proficiency tests, as well as student grades and GPA data as supporting documents. Further, as an administrator at the IEP under investigation, a positioning that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, I also had access to internal survey and course evaluation data. With the approval of the IRB, I utilized these data to corroborate the trends identified in observational and interview data. The inclusion of these different participant groups and this use of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation of the data, helping to reduce researcher bias and improve the validity of the study by testing for consistency across data sources and methods. As evidenced above, this study followed an emergent research design and thus, some modifications to the proposed research design were made along the way in order to respond to the data in an open and flexible way (Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002). These modifications will be outlined throughout my discussion of the research design and methodology of this dissertation study. In addition, this flexible approach of emergent design will be further

discussed at the end of this chapter when considering the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data.

Research Site

The research site for this study was the IEP within the English language programs at an elite, private university. This university, which will be referred to throughout this dissertation as Fisher University, is located within a large city in the Northeast of the United States. Permission to conduct this dissertation study was secured from the Executive Director of the English language programs at Fisher University and the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting any research. To ensure anonymity for the program, university, and all participants, pseudonyms will be used throughout this dissertation.

Fisher University is a rather larger private university that enrolls more than 10,000 undergraduate students and 11,000 graduate students each year on its idyllic, urban campus. The nearly $52,000 undergraduate tuition makes Fisher University one of the most expensive universities in the country. As is the case with many prestigious American universities, Fisher strives for diversity and internationalism among its student population. According to the Fall 2015 admissions data, 52% of incoming Fisher students were black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American and 12% of the student body were international students. Accordingly, the IEP at Fisher University enjoys many privileges associated with being housed at such a prestigious university, including Fisher's status and reputation, the university's diverse climate, and the numerous student resources available on campus. However, the tuition for the IEP at Fisher is also very

expensive (i.e., $5,300 for one seven-week session) and thus, the students who are able to afford the program tend to come from affluent and privileged backgrounds; a factor that will be explored at length later in this dissertation.

Courses at the IEP at Fisher University run on a seven-week schedule with six distinct sessions being offered throughout the year. The curriculum of this program is structured into eight different levels of proficiency—from beginning (CEFR A1-) to advanced (CEFR B2+/C1) (Council of Europe, 2001). The IEP labels each of these levels with a number from 100 to 800, with 100 being the lowest and 800 being the highest level offered in the program. As noted above, the goal of the majority of the students enrolled in this program is to gain the English language and academic skills necessary to obtain admission to and succeed in undergraduate or graduate degree programs in the United States. In order to achieve this goal, most students enrolled at Fisher's IEP study for multiple sessions and move through several levels during their course of study. However, it is important to remember that each student's path of study is somewhat unique as students enter the IEP at different levels of proficiency, progress through the IEP levels at different paces, and study at the IEP for varying lengths of time. In this regard, there is a great deal of variation in students' length of study at this IEP: Some students may study at the IEP for only one session, while other students may remain at this IEP for as many as 12 sessions (i.e., two years).

The IEP at Fisher University has consistently been large according to IEP standards (Thompson, 2013), as the program has generally enrolled more than 200 students each session. When considering the size of this IEP, it may be important to note

that the IEP at Fisher University experienced a surge in enrollments from the fall of 2010 through the spring of 2015 (just prior to the start of data collection). During this four-and-a-half-year time period, enrollments averaged at 346.7 students each session. This increase in enrollments was largely the result of the 2005 establishment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which is sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM). To put the impact of this scholarship program into context, it is important to look at enrollment statistics from before and after the scholarship's implementation. In 2004, Saudi Arabia sent only 334 students to IEPs in the United States, which made the country the 18th ranked sender of students. However, by 2010, Saudi Arabia had become the number one sender of students to American IEPs enrolling 11,814 students that year and peaking at 38,165 IEP student enrollments in 2013 (IIE, 2016). The influx of Saudi students had a huge impact on the IEP at Fisher University, as it did on IEPs throughout the field. Although the King Abdullah Scholarship Program continues to sponsor students for study in the United States, regulations were tightened in 2015 and new eligibility requirements were established. As a result of these new regulations, SACM enrollments in U.S. IEPs have been decreasing considerably in recent months. Country specific data on 2016 IEP enrollments were not yet available from the Institute of International Education at the time of this writing; however, overall IEP enrollments declined 14.6% from the 2014/2015 to the 2015/2016 academic year (IIE, 2016). It is likely that this decline in overall enrollments can be largely attributed to the decrease in SACM enrollments.

The field wide enrollment trends were likewise witnessed in the enrollments at Fisher University. From the fall of 2015 through the spring of 2016, the period when the majority of data were collected for this study, overall IEP enrollments at Fisher had declined to an average of 274.7 students enrolled each session. Saudi Arabia remained the number one sender of students to Fisher's IEP during this time; however, the number of Saudi students had decreased by 43% from the 179 enrolled Saudi students in the fall of 2014 to 102 students in the fall of 2015. That said, the vast majority of students at Fisher still came from the Middle East (more than 70%) in the fall of 2015, with the second largest subset of students coming from Asia (see Table 1). Despite the heavy representation of Saudi Arabian and other Middle Eastern students, Fisher still had around 20 different countries represented in its student body each session.

Table 1

Fall 2015 Enrollment by Country of Citizenship

Country	*n*	%
Saudi Arabia	102	36.6
Oman	50	17.9
Kuwait	47	16.8
Japan	19	6.8
South Korea	17	6.1
China	12	4.3
Taiwan	6	2.2
United States	5	1.8
Turkey	3	1.1
Colombia	3	1.1
Taiwan	4	1.4
Thailand	2	0.7
Vietnam	2	0.7
Yemen	1	0.4
Spain	1	0.4
Switzerland	1	0.4
France	1	0.4
Italy	1	0.4
Kazakhstan	1	0.4
Kyrgyzstan	1	0.4
Total	279	100

As stated above, the majority of students enrolled in the IEP at Fisher are academically bound. In order to meet students' academic goals, the IEP at Fisher University offers a wide variety of courses for students who plan to study at a university in the United States after they finish studying English in the program. Students at lower levels of English proficiency in the IEP (levels 100-500, which are equivalent to CEFR A1- to B1-) take two courses each session: (a) a reading and writing course and (b) a listening and speaking course. Once students possess an intermediate level of English proficiency (CEFR B1+) or higher, they are able to select electives that are more tailored

to their specific language learning needs and academic goals (e.g., Reading for Academic Purposes, Advanced Speaking and Listening for Academic Purposes, Listening to Lectures, English for Engineering, Research Paper Writing). At the 600 and 700 levels in the IEP, students take one integrated skills core course and then select two intermediate electives, while students at the 800 level choose all four of the elective courses that make up the entirety of their schedules.

One track within the IEP at Fisher University is the University Preparation Program, which supports students through the university application and admissions process and is intended to prepare these students for the challenge of the rigorous coursework they will encounter at the university level. This program has been designed for students who plan to study at a university in the U.S. (or other English-speaking country). Courses in this program focus on learning about the application process, writing application essays and personal statements, and practicing skills and strategies for the TOEFL iBT. Students in this program also have the opportunity to participate in one-on-one advising, during which they can receive individual help with their college applications, feedback on their personal statements or admissions essays, and support in developing study strategies that will help them to be more successful in university-level classes.

As part of the University Preparation Program, students also have the option of enrolling in test preparation courses (SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT or other admissions required tests) at an additional cost to the general IEP tuition. Further, advanced level students in this program can apply to take a credit course at Fisher University in order to

enhance their academic background and more realistically prepare themselves for the rigor of their future university coursework. The IEP provides all students who are enrolled in a university credit course with a workshop class that offers students with the opportunity to focus on the transition to university coursework by learning about the culture of university life in the U.S., practicing effective time management strategies and study skills, and receiving support in successfully completing the assigned work for their credit class.

Fisher University is a particularly appropriate research site for this study because the student population in this program is representative of the growing trend of academically bound students who are studying at IEPs in the United States as a preliminary step in the pursuit of their academic goals. According to the Institute of International Education, the total number of international students studying in the U.S. broke the million student mark in the 2015/2016 academic year, with nearly 40,000 of those students studying in IEPs that same year (IIE, 2016). The academic ambitions of the students in this IEP were confirmed by the results of the yearly IEP student survey that was administered in the fall of 2015. The survey results indicated that 77% of the students enrolled in the program aspired to attend undergraduate (41%) or graduate (36%) degree programs at American universities, while another 4% hoped to attend an English speaking university outside of the U.S. and 9% planned to complete their university degree in their home country. Altogether, 90% of the IEP students surveyed in the fall of 2015 cited academic goals as their reason for studying in the program. Such a high percentage of academically oriented students has become the norm for many

university-based IEPs in recent years. The IEP at Fisher University has responded to this shift in student goals with the creation and expansion of the above described University Preparation Program features, which focus specifically on preparing students for university admissions and enrollment. By focusing on the development of such preparatory program resources in recent years, this IEP has made the academic preparation of university bound students a priority and the organization has been particularly interested in learning how it can better serve the needs of this student population.

Participants

Participants in this study included students, instructors, and administrators who were all currently or formerly affiliated with the IEP at Fisher University. Participant recruitment and participation took different forms across the three participant groups and will thus, be outlined in turn below.

Students

All of the students recruited to participate in interviews for this study were international students who were enrolled, or had been formerly enrolled, in the IEP at Fisher University. It is important to note that almost all of the IEP students at Fisher University are international students, as domestic linguistic minority students (i.e. first-generation immigrant or refugee ESL students) very rarely enroll in this program. Three subsets of these students were initially recruited to participate, with the goal of including 5-10 student participants in each subgroup. This division of students into subgroups was modified to just two subgroups during the course of data collection and will be described

in detail below. Despite this modification, the ultimate purpose of interviewing students at different points in their trajectories of academic pursuit remained the same: To gain a greater understanding of how student expectations, aspirations, and needs may develop and/or change throughout the college-going process.

In order to increase confidence and add credibility to the sample of student participants, I first employed stratified random sampling to identify student participants for inclusion in this study (Patton, 2002). As outlined above, the population of IEP students were originally divided into three subgroups or strata: (a) newly arrived students to the IEP with beginner/intermediate English proficiency levels, (b) IEP students enrolled in courses at the highest levels of the IEP and who were actively engaged in the applications and admissions process, and (c) former IEP students who had successfully matriculated into an undergraduate or graduate degree program or who had instead chosen to pursue an alternate academic path (e.g., returning to their home countries for further study, enrolling in a community college, etc.). A simple random sample was then taken from each stratum. This method of sampling was accomplished by creating a numbered list of students in each subgroup and then using a random number generator to identify a sample of 20 students from each stratum. Subsequently, the selected students were contacted by email and asked to participate in this study (10 students from each subgroup were emailed initially, while the remaining students were contacted later, as needed, based on the response rate in each subgroup).

Although I received a robust response from students in the second subgroup (actively applying students at higher levels of proficiency), the response rates from the

randomly selected students in the first and third subgroups were dismal. As described previously, it quickly became apparent during the recruitment process and my initial student interviews that the division of currently enrolled students into two separate subgroups was problematic. Thus, the low response rate from the first subgroup was resolved when I merged it with the second subgroup; creating one subgroup of currently enrolled students. Despite the high response rate that resulted from the random sampling of this strata, I decided to somewhat alter my sampling approach in this subgroup as well. Instead of strictly adhering to the random sampling of these students, I also purposefully sampled several students who had taken a credit-bearing course while studying at the IEP. I made this decision because interviews with the University Preparation Program administrators and one of the initially identified student participants indicated that the credit course option may be an important program feature to explore in greater depth. By employing purposeful sampling in this instance, I was able to select a few information-rich, illuminative cases for study that I "could learn the most from" (Patton, 2002, p. 233).

In terms of the former student subgroup, I also had to be more purposeful in my sampling and recruitment in order to obtain enough participants. Initially, I had randomly sampled 20 students from a list of all IEP students who had been part of the University Preparation Program and had finished studying at the IEP the previous spring. However, the emails to this initial selection of 20 former students yielded only one interview. Due to the limitations faced in recruiting these former students, I decided to shift my sampling approach to instead obtain a sample of convenience. In order to do so,

I subsequently reached out to Lauren, the University Preparation advising specialist, to help me select former students who may be more likely to respond to my request to participate in an interview. Lauren provided me with a list of another 20 former students who were in their first or second year of a degree program. With some persistence on my part, I was ultimately able to recruit five former student participants from this list of students.

Overall, the student participants in both subgroups were quite diverse and generally rather representative of the overall IEP population at Fisher University in terms of ratios of gender, age ($M = 23.2$, $SD = 4.8$), country of origin, degree pursued, and funding source (see Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	8	47.1
Male	9	52.9
Age		
18-20	7	41.2
21-25	4	23.5
26-30	4	23.5
31-35	2	11.8
Country of Origin		
China	2	11.8
Columbia	1	5.9
France	1	5.9
Kazakhstan	1	5.9
Oman	3	17.6
Saudi Arabia	7	41.2
Senegal	1	5.9
Turkey	1	5.9
Degree Pursued		
Undergraduate	7	41.2
Graduate	10	58.8
Funding Source		
Scholarship	12	70.6
Self/Parents	5	29.4
IEP Enrollment Status		
Currently Enrolled	12	70.6
Formerly Enrolled	5	29.4

Current Student Subgroup

The first group of students (n = 12) who participated in interviews for this study were those who were currently enrolled in the IEP at Fisher University at the time of their interviews. This included six students who had recently arrived (within the last one or two sessions) at the IEP, as well as another six students who had been studying at the IEP for a longer period of time (four to six sessions) (see Table 3). The students in this group

had intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency. At the time they were interviewed, the student participants in this subgroup were enrolled in the following levels: one student at the 500 level, one student at the 600 level, two students at the 700 level, and the remaining eight student participants at the 800 level. It is important to note that IEP students at Fisher University can, and often do, spend multiple sessions at the 800 level as it is the highest level offered in the program and the curriculum provides enough advanced electives that students are able to study at that level for multiple sessions without repeating courses. It is also helpful to notice the varying proficiency levels upon entry to the IEP that were exhibited among students in this subgroup. The least proficient student upon entry, Julio, placed into the 300 level when he arrived while the most proficient student upon entry, Chi, placed into the 800 level. This wide range in proficiency upon entry, with most student participants placing somewhere between the 500 and 700 levels (M = 566.7, SD = 143.3), substantiated my rationale for combining all current student participants into one subgroup (see Table 3).

Table 3

Current Student Subgroup: Interview Participants and Characteristics

Student	Age at Interview	Gender	Country of Origin	IEP Level at Interview	Length of IEP Study at Interview	IEP Level at Entry	Degree Pursued	Funding Source
Abdul	24	M	Saudi Arabia	800	11 months	500	Graduate	Government Scholarship
Aisha	32	F	Saudi Arabia	700	3 months	500	Graduate	Government Scholarship
Badir	18	M	Oman	500	1 month	500	Undergraduate	Government Scholarship
Chi	24	M	China	800	1 month	800	Graduate	Self/Parents
Ingrid	18	F	France	800	3 months	700	Undergraduate	Self/Parents
Jiao	24	F	China	800	11 months	600	Graduate	Self/Parents
Julio	26	M	Colombia	600	9 months	300	Graduate	Self/Parents
Khulood	18	F	Oman	800	4 months	700	Undergraduate	Government Scholarship
Leizl	18	F	Oman	800	4months	700	Undergraduate	Government Scholarship
Mustafa	18	M	Saudi Arabia	800	11 months	600	Undergraduate	Company Scholarship
Saad	23	M	Saudi Arabia	800	7 months	500	Graduate	Government Scholarship
Youssef	26	M	Saudi Arabia	800	11 months	400	Graduate	Government Scholarship

Although I recruited this subgroup of students primarily through a random sampling method, I believe it is useful to compare the characteristics of this sample to that of the general IEP student population at Fisher University. Table 3 indicates that the average age of student participants in this subgroup was 22.4 (SD = 4.5), with five female participants (41.7%) and seven male participants (58.3%). This is in close alignment with the demographic data reported on the fall 2015 IEP student survey, in which respondents reported a mean age of 21.9 and there was a 62% to 38% male to female response rate. In terms of country of origin, the student participants in this subgroup were relatively typical of the overall demographic breakdown of all students enrolled in the IEP (see Table 1): five students were from Saudi Arabia (41.7%), three students were from Oman (25%), two students were from China (16.7%), one student was from Colombia (8.3%), and one student was from France (8.3%). Slightly more student participants in this subgroup were pursuing graduate degrees (58.3%) than were planning to attend undergraduate programs (41.7%). According to the IEP student survey administered in the fall of 2015, 37% of IEP students were self or family funded, while 72%[1] were sponsored by their government, university, or employer. These funding patterns were replicated in the sample of this subgroup that included four self or family funded students (33.3%) and eight sponsored students (66.7%).

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[1] It can be assumed that the reason these percentages add up to over 100% is because some students were receiving funding from multiple sources and thus, selected more than one funding source. The raw response data for this question is as follows: Self- 17 responses (9%), Family- 52 responses (28%), Government- 120 responses (64%), Employer- 2 responses (1%), University- 14 responses (7%), Other- 3 responses (2%).

After conducting interviews with nine of the students in this subgroup during November and December of 2015, I made the decision to purposefully sample three more students: Jiao, Khulood, and Leizl. These students were recruited from the Study Skills and Strategies (SSS) course that was being taught in the Spring 1 session of 2016 and were interviewed in February of 2016. These three additional student participants were selected because they had taken or were currently taking a credit course; a program feature about which I wanted to learn more.

Former Student Subgroup

The second subgroup of student participants (n = 5) were individuals who had been formerly enrolled in the IEP at Fisher University and had subsequently left the IEP to pursue their academic goals. I had initially intended for this sample to include both former students who had successfully matriculated into an undergraduate or graduate degree program and former students who had instead chosen to pursue an alternate academic path (e.g., returning to their home countries for further study, enrolling in a community college, etc.). However, all of the former students who volunteered to participate in this study had, in fact, matriculated into an undergraduate or graduate degree program (see Table 4). Still, this sample did include Kamilah, a student who had left the IEP at Fisher to study at the local community college for a semester before beginning her undergraduate degree program the next fall. In this way, Kamilah could be considered to have, in a minimal way, pursued an alternate academic path. In terms of length of study at the IEP, these five student participants spent varying lengths of time at Fisher: from Kamilah, who only studied for four months to Dastan, who had studied at

the IEP for the longest for a period of time: 18 months. A range of proficiency levels upon entry to the IEP is also evident among participants in this group: The two least proficient students upon entry, Alhusain and Dastan, placed into the 400 level, while the most proficient student upon entry, Rana, placed into the 800 level. This variation is quite comparable to that exhibited in the current student subgroup (i.e., $M = 566.7$, $SD = 143.3$), with a mean placement level upon entry of 580 ($SD = 178.9$) among students in this subgroup.

Table 4

Former Student Subgroup: Interview Participants and Characteristics

Student	Age at Interview	Gender	Country of Origin	Length of IEP Study	IEP Level at Entry	University Attending	Degree Status at Interview	Degree Pursued	Funding Source
Akilah	26	F	Saudi Arabia	8 months	700	Jefferson University	4th semester	M.S. Biotechnology	Government Scholarship
Alhusain	26	M	Turkey	12 months	400	Drexel University	2nd semester	M.S. Mechanical Engineering	Government Scholarship
Dastan	33	M	Kazakhstan	18 months	400	George Washington University	Completed	LLM	Government Scholarship
Kamilah	20	F	Senegal	4 months	600	La Salle University	2nd semester	Undergraduate Major: Biology	Self/Parents
Rana	20	F	Saudi Arabia	9 months	800	Fisher University*	4th semester	Undergraduate Majors: Biology & Psychology	University Scholarship

*The pseudonym is used here to maintain the anonymity of the research site.

In terms of demographic characteristics, this subgroup of students was somewhat less representative of the overall IEP population, predominately due to the small size of this sample. As shown in Table 4, the average age of student participants in this subgroup was slightly higher at 25 ($SD = 5.4$) and the gender breakdown was basically the inverse of that in the general population with three female participants (60%) and two male participants (40%). Four different countries of origin were represented in this sample: Rana and Akilah were both from Saudi Arabia (40%), while Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Senegal were each represented by one participant. As was the case in the current student subgroup, more student participants in this subgroup were pursuing graduate degrees (60%), than were pursuing undergraduate degrees (40%) and most of the student participants in the group (80%) were receiving government or university scholarships to fund their studies. At the time of their interviews, these former students were either at the end of the first or second year of their degree programs and were pursuing degrees in a variety of fields including engineering, biology/biotechnology, psychology, and law.

Instructors

Instructors who teach courses within the IEP were recruited to participate in this study ($n = 5$). Because I wanted a variety of both part-time adjunct lecturers and full-time instructors with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, I utilized purposeful sampling of these participants. The goal in employing this sampling strategy was to achieve maximum variation sampling in order to select "a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Accordingly, I purposefully sampled instructor participants for several important variations, including their years of

teaching experience, full-time or part-time teaching status, experience teaching certain courses, and/or their experience with the University Preparation Program. My role as an administrator at this IEP also made the use of purposeful sampling important because I knew that all instructors I recruited would likely feel obliged to participate in the study. Due to this knowledge, I reached out to precisely the number of instructors who I wanted to include in the study as I knew I would probably encounter a 100% participation rate. As expected, all five recruited instructors agreed to participate in an interview in which they were asked about their experiences with this population of students.

As shown in Table 5, one male and four female instructors who ranged in ages from their early thirties to late fifties participated in this study. Four of the five participants were American born, while Agata, who was from Poland and immigrated to the United States after completing her PhD in Cracow, was the only non-native instructor who participated. These demographic characteristics are generally representative of the overall population of IEP instructors in terms of ages and gender ratio. In addition, the large majority of instructors at the IEP at Fisher University are American born and thus, only having one international instructor is also reflective of the general pool of instructors within the organization. During the fall of 2015, there were 15 full-time instructors and 23 adjunct lecturers employed at Fisher University. Even though a greater number of adjunct lecturers were teaching in Fisher's IEP at the time the data were collected, I made the conscious decision to instead include more full-time instructors (60%) than adjuncts (40%) in my study. This decision was made due to the more transient nature of many of the adjunct lecturers who are employed on a part-time basis versus the more prominent role that the full-time instructors play within the organization.

Table 5

Instructor Interview Participants and Characteristics

Instructor	Age at Interview	Gender	Country of Origin	Professional Role	Years Teaching	Years a Fisher IEP	Highest Degree(s) Attained	University Preparation Program Experience
Agata	Mid 40s	F	Poland	Adjunct Lecturer	20	7	PhD English	No
Emily	Early 30s	F	United States	Full-time Instructor	5	3	MSEd TESOL MSEd Elementary Education	No
Isaac	Mid 30s	M	United States	Full-time Instructor	11	4	MA English Literature	No
Jamie	Late 50s	F	United States	Adjunct Lecturer	29	14	MA TESOL MBA	No
Sandra	Mid 50s	F	United States	Full-time Instructor	25	15	MA Linguistics/TESOL	Yes

As stated above, I purposefully sampled instructors who had a range of general teaching experience and years teaching at Fisher: overall teaching experience among the participants ranged from 5 to 29 years (M = 18, SD = 9.9) and experience teaching at Fisher ranged from 3 to 15 years (M = 8.6, SD = 5.6). All of the participants possessed at least a Master's degree, with Emily and Jamie holding two Master's and Agata having earned a PhD. Initially, I had planned to interview at least two or three instructors who had experience teaching University Preparation courses or who had served as advisors within the program. However, after interviewing all of the full-time members of the University Preparation Program and realizing that very few other full-time or part-time instructors were directly involved in teaching or advising within the University Preparation Program, I decided it would be more illustrative to only include one participant in the instructor group, Sandra, who had direct experience with the University Preparation Program.

Administrators

Lastly, several relevant program administrators (n = 5) were also asked to participate in interviews as part of this study. The manager of the University Preparation Program, the advisors and counselors from the program, and the IEP manager were all recruited to participate because of the central roles they play in supporting the academically bound IEP students at Fisher University. Once again, this sample of administrators at Fisher University was selected purposefully due to the insight that these individuals would be able to provide on the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002). All five program administrators readily agreed to participate and they were asked detailed questions about the support services available to these students and the specific

strategies that they utilize to serve the international students in this program during the applications and admissions process.

As the administrators who participated in this study were selected solely for the positions that they held within Fisher's IEP, this sample was not intended to be representative of the overall population of administrators at the IEP. However, to put this sample of administrators into context, I will provide a quick summary of the administrative structure at Fisher. During the fall of 2015, there were 19 administrators employed at the English language programs at Fisher University, in addition to the 15 full-time instructors. Although every administrator in the organization was not directly involved with the University Preparation Program, most had some contact with the IEP as it was the organization's largest program at the time of data collection. Therefore, these five administrators represented 26.3% of the total administrative staff at Fisher University's English language programs. Table 6 shows that four of these administrators were female and one was male; all five of whom were native to the United States. The age range of this participant group was much more condensed than that of the instructor group, as these administrators were all between their early thirties to mid-forties. The overall teaching experience and/or experience as an administrator in the field among the participants in this group ranged from 7 to 16 years (M = 12.2, SD = 3.6), while their experience at Fisher varied from 4 to 10 years (M = 6.6, SD = 2.4). All five of these participants held Master's degrees: Amanda, Beth, Lauren, and Linda all held Master's degrees in TESOL, while Evan possessed a Master's in Professional Communication.

Table 6

Administrator Interview Participants and Characteristics

Administrator	Age at Interview	Gender	Country of Origin	Professional Role	Years Teaching/ Administration in the Field	Years at Fisher IEP	Highest Degree(s) Attained
Amanda	Early 30s	F	United States	IEP Manager	7	6	MSEd TESOL
Beth	Late 30s	F	United States	Full-time Instructor/University Preparation Program Advisor	12	8	MA TESOL
Evan	Late 30s	M	United States	University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist	15	5	MA Professional Communications
Lauren	Mid 30s	F	United States	University Preparation Program Advising Specialist	11	4	MSEd TESOL
Linda	Mid 40s	F	United States	University Preparation Program Manager	16	10	MS TESOL

Data Collection

I began collecting data for this dissertation study in the summer of 2015 and concluded the data collection process more than a year later, in the fall of 2016. In conducting research for this study, data collection and analysis was an ongoing and iterative process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Dörnyei, 2007). Accordingly, decisions were made to modify or expand data collection procedures at various points in the process in order to test and refine ideas and theories that had emerged out of initial analyses (e.g., I decided to conduct several more observations of one-on-one advising sessions in the fall of 2016 because these sessions had emerged as a crucial program feature). The following types of data were collected for this study: (a) interviews with students, instructors, and administrators; (b) observations of instruction, workshops, and advising sessions; and (c) student test scores and academic records.

Interviews

The interviews that I conducted throughout this dissertation study were all held in a one-on-one format and were semi-structured in nature, with protocols guiding the questions and then spontaneous follow-up questions being asked as they emerged in the discussions. In total, I conducted 29 qualitative interviews with 27 participants: 17 interviews with students (both currently and formerly enrolled), five interviews with instructors, and seven interviews with administrators (two of the administrators were interviewed a second time in follow-up interviews). All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed fully, and later qualitatively analyzed.

Student Interviews

Student participants from both subgroups were each interviewed once. Interviews with students lasted between 23 and 58 minutes, and detailed notes were taken throughout the interviews. Interviews with the students in the first subgroup of participants, currently enrolled students, were conducted face-to-face in a quiet office at Fisher University at a time that did not interfere with the students' class schedules. In terms of the second subgroup of students, two of the participants, Alhusain and Rana, were interviewed face-to-face as they were able to meet with me in my office on campus. The other three former student participants were interviewed remotely through the use of a telecommunications application software that allowed me to video chat with those students.

Student interviews began in November, 2015 with students in the first subgroup—currently enrolled students who were planning to soon apply or were actively engaged in the application process. Interviews with nine of the current student participants had concluded by December, 2015; however, three additional student participants who had enrolled in the credit course option were purposefully recruited the next month and interviewed in February, 2016. All 12 of these interviews followed a common interview guide that was used with students in this first subgroup (see Appendix A). In addition, I sent a follow-up email to all twelve of these students in April of 2016 to get an update from the student participants on the acceptances they had received and decisions they had made about their subsequent studies. Eight of the student participants in this subgroup replied to my email, providing me with an update on their admissions decisions. The interview guide that I used with the current student subgroup was modified and expanded

based on the trends that arose out of that first round of student interviews to create the interview protocol that I used with students in the second subgroup—formerly enrolled students who had matriculated into undergraduate or graduate degree programs (see Appendix B). The interviews with students in this second subgroup were conducted later in the data collection process, as I wanted these students to have experienced nearly one or two full academic years of study in their degree program prior to the interview. Ultimately, the five former student participants were interviewed between April and July of 2016.

The student participants in both subgroups were asked open-ended questions about their academic aspirations and expectations, their timeline for admission, their short-term and long-term goals, and the challenges they had faced thus far throughout their journey to study at an American university. Additionally, students were asked about their satisfaction with the IEP and the University Preparation Program to date, as well as how their aspirations, expectations, goals, and the challenges they had faced may have evolved since first arriving at the IEP. During the interviews, all student participants were asked to share their most recent standardized test scores, if available. Students were also asked to give permission to have their internal academic records and in-house proficiency test scores released; all students consented to this request. Students in the second subgroup—former IEP students who had progressed to degree programs—were also asked about the success they had experienced in their undergraduate or graduate degree programs and their perceptions of how well their IEP courses had prepared them for their university coursework.

Instructor Interviews

Instructors who agreed to participate in this study were each interviewed only once at the time of their choice, with interviews lasting between 26 and 49 minutes. Interviews with five IEP instructors were conducted face-to-face in a quiet office space at Fisher University, with detailed notes taken. These interviews were semi-structured and followed a common interview guide that was used with all instructors (see Appendix C). Interviews with instructors were conducted in November and December of 2015. The instructor participants were asked general questions about their background and teaching experience, as well as more specific questions about their experience with the University Preparation Program and their support of academically bound students at Fisher University.

Administrator Interviews

Interviews with five administrators were conducted face-to-face in either the administrators' offices or in my office. Initially, I interviewed each administrator for between 32 and 59 minutes. This initial interview with each administrator was semi-structured and followed a uniform interview guide (see Appendix D). These administrator interviews were conducted in July or August of 2015. During these interviews, administrator participants were asked about their general backgrounds and experiences, as well as their specific roles within the University Preparation Program and how they support academically bound students in those roles. As these interviews were conducted so early in the data collection process, there were questions that arose later that necessitated brief follow-up interviews with two of the administrator participants: Linda, the University Preparation Program Manager and Lauren, the University Preparation

Program Advising Specialist. These follow-up interviews were conducted in the spring of 2016.

Observations of Instruction, Workshops, and Advising Sessions

I conducted observations of 12 different IEP courses during the course of the data collection for this study. The selection of courses to be observed was purposeful in nature and was largely informed by the insights learned in the student, instructor, and administrator interviews. These classroom observations included four University Preparation Program courses (Study Skills and Strategies and three application essays/statements writing courses), two test preparation courses, three intermediate level EAP courses and three advanced level EAP courses. Each of these classroom observations lasted approximately one hour. In addition, I conducted observations of eight one-on-one advising sessions. Each of these advising sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes. I had initially conducted observations of five advising sessions during the fall of 2015. However, I decided to observe three more advising sessions with Lauren in the subsequent fall of 2016 after these one-on-one advising sessions emerged as the most helpful component of the University Preparation Program according to student participants. Finally, I also observed three admissions and applications workshops that were offered by the University Preparation Program staff. All of the aforementioned observations were non-participatory in nature, except for a few very brief exceptions when my participation was solicited. Detailed field notes were taken during all of the observations that were conducted, which were later analyzed qualitatively.

Student Test Scores and Academic Records

When students agreed to participate in this study, they were asked to share various academic and testing data. Students in both subgroups were asked to report their scores on any standardized proficiency exams (e.g., TOEFL iBT, IELTS, GRE, etc.) that they had taken and the dates of those exam administrations. TOEFL iBT and IELTS test scores were collected from students primarily as a measure of language proficiency. As other data were collected, the relationships between these test scores and students' academic preparation and socialization were explored. Although the reliability and predictability of these exams have been called into question (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Cheng, 2000; Cho & Bridgeman, 2012; Kokhan, 2012), it was important to collect these scores as they remain the common gold standard in measuring international applicants' language proficiency. Due to the fact that a TOEFL iBT or IELTS score is a necessary requirement of international students for the large majority of university applications, these data can also serve as a measure of students' college knowledge. In addition, all student participants were also asked to provide informed consent to release their scores on the in-house placement and proficiency tests that they had taken during their study at the IEP, as well as their Fisher IEP transcripts of courses taken and grades received. As all students provided this consent, I was able to retrieve participants' transcript data and in-house test scores from the IEP's internal records. These internal test scores included the students' initial placement test results, the results from the high intermediate level entry exam (taken when students complete the 500 level), and the results from the advanced level entry exam (taken when students complete the 700 level). Students in the former student subgroup were also asked to share their grades and/or GPAs in the

undergraduate or graduate degree program to which they had matriculated. These test score and grade data were used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the student participants' levels of English proficiency, course taking patterns, and academic achievement, while exploring the ways in which these factors may impact their college-going aspirations and success.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was guided by situated learning theory and was focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of this specific international student population. In particular, the student participants' participation in various communities of practice were focused upon when analyzing the data in response to the research questions set forth in this study. As noted above, data collection and analysis was an ongoing, iterative process and emergent design flexibility was employed when it became evident that there was a need for data collection deviation and/or expansion (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002). All of the student, instructor, and administrator interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed fully, while extensive field notes were taken during the observations of classroom instruction, workshops, and advising sessions. These transcriptions and field notes amounted to a vast quantity of data that needed to be managed in order to identify the most salient themes to emerge from the research.

In order to manage this volume of data, I first manually coded three student interviews. By taking on this small subset of the data, I was able to create a preliminary codebook of descriptive codes that were reflective of the topics covered as well as the ways in which those topics were related to the research questions under investigation.

For example, this preliminary codebook included such descriptive codes as *short term goals*, *application essays*, *academic challenges*, and *test prep classes*. By employing this descriptive coding strategy in my initial coding, I created words or short phrases that could summarize "the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 83). I then moved all of the data into the qualitative analysis software package, QSR NVivo 11, where I created additional codes as they emerged from the data. I progressed through the coding of the data categorically; moving from the transcripts of the student interviews to the instructor and administrator interview data and then onto the field notes.

As I coded the data, I continued to create and modify codes, while systematically comparing the codes against one another. The codes were then modified and grouped into several larger conceptually related categories of trends until a point of saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, Willis, 2007). At this point, I created a hierarchy by arranging the codes into sub-codes and meta-codes (Saldaña, 2013). For example, *University Preparation Program* was designated as the meta-code with *advising support*, *college fair*, *foundation year*, *learning about resources*, *credit course*, *test prep courses*, *University Preparation courses*, and *workshops* all identified of sub-codes underneath the meta-code. By engaging in this secondary coding or "subcoding", I was better able to make sense of the relationships between individual descriptive codes by developing more nuanced classification schemes (Saldaña, 2013). Throughout both the first and secondary coding of these data, I also engaged in simultaneous coding in which "two or more different codes [were applied] to a single qualitative datum" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 80) whenever the data's content necessitated multiple codes.

I also wrote theoretical memos throughout and after the coding process in order to systematically keep track of the theoretical concepts, categories, and the hypotheses that arose and were revised during the coding process. These memos were particularly useful in analyzing the dynamic nature of the data and the ways in which salient themes were related to the theoretical construct of situated learning (Mercer, 2011). Important concepts were identified based on their repeated presence throughout the data and emergent questions were investigated as the data collection and analysis continued to inform one another. In addition to the identification of these themes in the theoretical memos, the classification and creation of more meta-codes, such as *academic goals*, *academic preparation and readiness*, and *academic socialization* were also able to guide this analysis through the regrouping and relabeling of data into concrete themes. Throughout the entirety of this data analysis process, these themes were continually related back to the essential question of how this IEP was supporting its academically bound students through the applications and admissions process while providing these students with the academic preparation and socialization necessary for eventual degree attainment.

Researcher's Position

As an administrator, and occasional instructor, at the IEP where the research was conducted, it is impossible to maintain that my positionality did not influence the data collection and analysis. As such, I have tried to remain cognizant of that fact and discuss any instances in which my position within the organization may have influenced participant behavior, my observations, or my perceptions. Because of this awareness, I continually made a conscious effort to avoid potentially coercive behavior or any

research practices that would take unfair advantage of my position within the organization. In order to do so, I took great care to reduce the risk of undue influence and ensure that all participation in the study was as voluntary as possible. First and foremost, I did not solicit students from any of my own classes nor did I include any students in the study who I had previously taught. Instead, I recruited students from the program through the indirect methods of IRB approved emails. Further, students were made explicitly aware that their participation in the study (or lack thereof) would have no impact on their course grades or their overall achievement in the program. Luckily, my role within the organization is not very visible to students (i.e., most students do not know who I am or what I do) and thus, I do not think my position significantly impacted student participation rates or responses.

In terms of the participation of instructors and administrators, email recruitment of these colleagues explicitly stated that there would be absolutely no retribution if they choose not to participate. In addition, instructors and administrators were repeatedly assured that the opinions expressed in the interviews they provided for this study would have no impact on their employment within the organization. Despite these overt assurances, it would be naïve of me to think that my position did not impact administrators' and instructors' willingness to participate or the candidness of their responses. This is largely due to the fact that my position within the organization placed me above all of the administrators and instructors who participated in the study within the organization's hierarchical structure. Additionally, I oversee all of the curriculum and instruction within the organization at Fisher University and thus, the administrator and instructor participants may have been reluctant to criticize those institutional components.

The issue then arises as to the trustworthiness and authenticity of these data. Although my position certainly influenced some of the participation rates and data that were collected in this study, I made great efforts to adopt a stance of neutrality by not setting out to prove a particular theory or achieve certain results. Instead, I committed to being open to the data as it unfolded in front of me. In order to attain as much neutrality as possible, I adopted a variety of research strategies including multiple data sources, triangulation, systematic collection and coding procedures, and deliberately searching for disconfirming evidence (Patton, 2002).

Despite the challenges inherent to negotiating these dual positions, I believe that I was able to successfully "go into the field" and have "direct and personal contact with people under study in their own environments" when collecting data for this dissertation (Patton, 2002, p. 48). Further, my positioning within the organization did also have substantial benefits, including giving me greater access to participants, internal data, institutional knowledge, and historical context of the organization. In terms of benefits for participants, no financial compensation was offered in exchange for participation in this study; however, the participants were rewarded with the opportunity for self-reflection by engaging in the interview process. In addition, I plan to offer a presentation of my findings to instructors and administration in the program in order to provide all staff members with an opportunity for learning about the research.

In the next three chapters, I present the findings of this dissertation. Chapter 4 describes the results relating to the role of IEPs in the academic socialization of academically bound international students. In Chapter 5, I outline the findings surrounding the support international students at the IEP under investigation received

during the applications and admissions process. Finally, Chapter 6 presents an exploration of the academic preparation that the international students at this IEP experienced.

CHAPTER 4

ACADEMIC SOCIALIZATION

In order to better ensure international students' ultimate academic success once they gain acceptance to and matriculate into a degree program, it is important to explore the academic socialization that occurs prior to their matriculation when these students are enrolled in an IEP. Accordingly, this chapter examines the first research question in this study: What role do IEPs play in the academic socialization of international students throughout the university applications, admissions, and enrollment processes? To address this research question, I investigated students' participation in the IEP community and classroom, as well as their engagement in the larger university community of practice. The findings of this study revealed that IEPs can play an integral role in supporting students' academic socialization by providing their students with authentic opportunities for academic engagement inside and outside of the IEP classroom. The international students enrolled at the IEP under investigation seemed to benefit greatly from the social interactions they engaged in through the perceived "safety" of the IEP community of practice. By offering access to American academia and providing students with explicit instruction on cultural and classroom expectations, this IEP was able to function as a gateway to the larger university community. However, the data also illuminated a concern among participants about students' limited academic participation in the greater university community and highlighted the need for IEP students to gain more access to the university community of practice. These findings are

presented in turn in this chapter to elaborate on the ways in which the themes emerged through the data analysis.

Participation in the IEP Community and Classroom

For many of the academically bound international students at Fisher University's IEP, it is their first time studying abroad and thus, the IEP serves as their initial exposure to American academia. As the first point of contact for many international students, the IEP plays an important role in supporting these students in their pursuit of the college-going knowledge, linguistic proficiency, and academic skills necessary to succeed in their subsequent degree programs. In order to better understand the academic socialization that actually occurs while students are enrolled in an IEP, I explored students' participation and engagement while studying within the community of practice of this IEP—both within and outside of the classroom.

Socialization within the IEP Community of Practice

When considering the ways in which this IEP helps support students' social development and meet their affective needs while they acculturate into American academia, it is important to first understand the structure of this program and the types of social activities that are made available to these students. The IEP at Fisher University is an "intensive" program for a reason: Students enroll in an intense program of study in which they attend class for between 20 to 24 hours each week. These classes are generally held between eight in the morning and five in the afternoon, with students also having the option of enrolling in evening courses one or two nights each week. Students in levels 100-700 must attend classes five days a week, while 800-level students attend classes four days a week as the advanced electives do not meet on Fridays. Given this

program structure, these students are obligated to spend a great deal of time physically on campus at the IEP and surrounded by other IEP students. Although classes sometimes meet in other university buildings, most of the IEP classes are housed within the same building on Fisher's campus. In fact, the majority of IEP courses are held within five central classrooms that are all located in the same hallway in that building. That hallway also contains the offices of IEP instructors as well as the Fisher IEP student center, which will be described in more detail below. This centralized arrangement of the classrooms allows for a great deal of interaction among students as they move between classes and facilitates a sense of community among the program's students, instructors, and administrators.

IEP classes meet at various times throughout the day and students frequently have breaks between their classes. During this break time, students have access to the IEP student center, which is a lounge space that is open to IEP students throughout the duration of each day. The student center serves as the hub of Fisher's IEP and is the main congregation area for students outside of class. This center offers students a place to study, relax, and interact with other IEP students, as well as with the student workers (i.e., undergraduate or graduate Fisher University students) who staff the center. Students frequently use this space to eat their meals with one another and get beverages during breaks between their classes, as coffee and tea are provided in the center. In addition, the student center also functions as the main site for many IEP social activities (e.g., art projects, cooking activities, holiday crafts, etc.) that are organized by the Student Services Coordinator and led by the student center staff or sometimes by IEP students themselves. Walking into this student center at any given time of day, I have observed a

variety of interactional types ranging from quiet one-on-one conversations to lively interactions among larger groups of students. Students are encouraged to practice their English while in the student center; however, speaking other languages is certainly not prohibited and I have on occasion heard Saudi students trying to learn Japanese or a Korean student greeting a classmate with the traditional Arabic greeting: "As-salaam 'alaykum." Although this student center largely functions as a safe and non-confrontational space for IEP students at Fisher University, disagreements among students have also occasionally occurred in the space that needed to be resolved by IEP administrators.

The Fisher University IEP offers its students a variety of additional activities and programs that are designed to enhance students' social involvement while studying at the IEP. In addition to the student center activities described above, these activities include weekly cultural events (e.g., academic lectures, film screenings, museum visits, etc.), bus trips to other local cities and attractions, volunteer opportunities, and a conversation partners program that pairs IEP students with matriculated Fisher students for language and cultural exchange. When considering academic socialization and student life, it is also important to briefly describe the housing these students' experienced during their IEP studies. Students at Fisher's IEP do not have access to Fisher University dormitories. Instead, IEP students generally stay in near campus apartments arranged by Fisher, with a homestay family, or at an off-campus apartment that they arrange independently.

Although all of the students who participated in this study arrived at Fisher's IEP with the same academic goal of gaining admission to an American university, their expectations for social involvement during their IEP studies varied. As a result of these

different expectations, there was quite a bit of diversity in student participants' experiences and perspectives about their social participation while studying at Fisher's IEP. Despite these differences, the data illuminated several ways in which students' social participation in the IEP community of practice functioned as a means of academic socialization for these students. The following two themes will be discussed in turn: (a) IEP organized activities and (b) interaction with IEP students.

IEP Organized Activities

First and foremost, the data revealed that the social activities that were arranged by Fisher's IEP served as an easy means of entry into social engagement in the IEP community of practice for these students. Although participants reported varying degrees of involvement in these activities, all of the student participants had attended at least one IEP organized social event. Students reported that participation in these prearranged activities gave them a venue outside of class to interact with one another, practice their English, and learn about American culture. Khulood, an 18-year-old Omani student, was particularly invested in social participation while enrolled in Fisher's IEP and had actually worked with other IEP students to found an Omani student association at Fisher. When explaining why she participated in IEP social activities, Khulood explained:

> They are definitely helpful to learn how to socialize in American setting, if it makes sense, because it is different than the parties and socialize setting than back home. . . . It is similar in some ways but there are different techniques to slide into a conversation or to make small talk basically. The topics you talk about are a bit different—you talk about the weather, the IEP, the classes you are taking, where are you from because it is a multicultural program.

Thus, engaging in these activities allowed Khulood an opportunity to develop her social skills so that she could feel more comfortable participating in the "multicultural" university community of practice.

Khulood, however, seemed to be an outlier in her devotion to social engagement, as most other students were not as interested or willing to commit their time to such levels of participation in social activities. In fact, lack of time was the most cited reason by students for not attending more IEP organized social and cultural events. Aisha, a 32-year-old Saudi student applying for admission to a PhD program, experienced this challenge and explained, "I wish I could do more but I didn't have time to participate more." Nonetheless, Aisha found the few activities that she was able to participate in to be beneficial for her and explained the advantages of participating in these activities by explaining, "because you can use the English all the time, contact with others and relax." Although the IEP organized social activities seemed to be serving their intended purpose for those students who participated, the challenge that arose from the data is to find a way to convince these very busy IEP students of the value of attending these social activities when they feel overburdened by the time commitment involved in the college-going process.

Interaction with IEP Students

In addition to students' involvement in IEP sponsored activities, natural interaction with other IEP students manifested itself as a prominent theme in students' discussion of their social participation while studying at Fisher. Interaction with other IEP students outside of class was discussed by many participants as a useful resource for easing their acculturation into U.S. study. Participants described their interactions with

other IEP students as being "easy" and "helpful" because their IEP classmates understood what they were going through and it was not difficult to interact with them. For example, Julio, a 26-year-old Colombian student interested in pursuing an MBA, described the ease he had in interacting with other IEP students by stating, "I talk with all different people—different people as my classmates, another class, so I speak with someone—for me it is fun and easy to speak with somebody; I am not afraid." Throughout the interview data, the safety and stress-free nature inherent in the interactions with other IEP students was highlighted by participants. Despite the ease and comfort that participants described when discussing their relationships with other IEP students, the participants also expressed two major critiques associated with this type of interaction: (a) There were too many Arabic speaking students at the IEP and (b) there was not enough interaction with American students.

The perception that there were "too many" Arabic speaking students enrolled in Fisher's IEP was one that kept surfacing in interview after interview. Leizl, an 18-year-old student from Oman, described her dissatisfaction with the fact that she interacted predominately with other Arab students in the following excerpt:

> I improved my English a lot but because we don't have a lot of Americans around here, I think that has minimized my chances of speaking in English all the time and I want to do that—but without being interrupted with Arabic all the time. But because we have a lot of Arabs here, Saudis, Omanis, all around the place so you are speaking Arabic most of the time. So that is why I am mostly not satisfied because I want to speak it [English] all the time to get used to it.

In this case, Leizl viewed the preponderance of Arabic speakers as more than just a social shortfall, but as a deficit to her English language development. The dissatisfaction with having a predominately Arab student population was not only explicated by the other

Arabic speaking students. Instead, student participants from other language backgrounds also pointed out the challenge of being surrounded by so many students from one linguistic background. Jiao, a 24-year-old Chinese student who was applying to graduate programs in design, stated the following:

> I think here I [would] have a lot of friends from different countries. Here students will be more diverse. It would be better. [But] here most of my friends are Arabic, not other. I don't have other friends now. So I think more diversity would be better.

Jiao's critique here is interesting, because she did not directly relate the preponderance of Arabic speaking students to an issue of English language development or other linguistic concerns. Instead, she focused on the vague benefits associated with having "more diversity" in her IEP friendships.

Despite the highly perceptible disadvantages of having so many Arabic speaking students enrolled in the program, some students did recognize that there were also advantages to being surrounded by students with similar backgrounds. Alhusain, a formerly enrolled Turkish student who had matriculated into a Master's program in engineering, discussed the complex feelings he had about associating with other Turkish students:

> Alhusain: If you need some help, they [Turkish students] can always help us, which is a great thing. We hang out a lot, but this is not good for improving English. I have been in the U.S. for almost 2 years and my English—especially my speaking—is not really improved because of having too many Turkish friends in here. This is a disadvantage but we have lots of advantages too. The feeling of mine, we try to make American friends because we are in the United States, we get to know each other and you get other friends and can learn about the culture, lifestyle. I am interested in those things. [But] because of my Turkish friends, maybe I

am shy. I sometimes work with them [American students] on projects.

Sarah: So you have classmates that you are friendly with, but they are not your close friends?

Alhusain: We maybe get coffee at the Starbucks, but it is not more than that. But we have some other friends: Indians, Lebanese, Chinese friends. Immigrant students are friendlier with other immigrant students and Americans are usually together. They can understand each other because we are not natives in here. That is my feeling.

In this interview excerpt, Alhusain was able to express both his dissatisfaction with relying so much on his Turkish friends and the difficulty he has had in interacting with American students. Thus exists the challenge many international students continue to face even after they have matriculated into degree programs at American universities: International students, in large part, continue to remain at the periphery of these social institutions and are frequently unable to gain full participation into the university community of practice (Straker, 2016).

In contrast to the general satisfaction student participants found in their interactions with other IEP and international students, many of the student participants interviewed for this dissertation expressed similar displeasure with the fact that they had not been able to form close friendships with American students. Julio, the Colombian student who described feeling so comfortable when talking to IEP students, presented a very different outlook when asked if he interacts with American students:

> No, I don’t know why. I tried to do it [talk to American students], [but] I feel afraid because I thought that they would not be interested in us because we are in the IEP. But I am trying to change my mind about it.

It is interesting that a student who had felt so at ease and outgoing among other international students would likewise be intimidated around American students. The safety and comfort these students felt when interacting with their IEP classmates and other international students was simply not present in their interactions with American students.

Other student participants described similar challenges with meeting American students—saying that they would try to make small talk, but could not develop those interactions into friendships. Leizl, the Omani student who had expressed her dissatisfaction with interacting with so many Arabic speakers, explained that she does not really "hang out" with the few Americans she had met in her apartment building. When I asked if she had expected to have made more American friends, she reflected on the situation by stating, "I expected that I would meet more Americans. I expected both Americans and internationals and then I realized that it's an English language program, so why would Americans need this?" In this case, it seems that Leizl was relying on the IEP as the site in which she could form friendships, while she recounted few opportunities for meaningful interactions within the larger university community. In these narratives, we see evidence of the marginalized status that IEPs and their students have long held within the larger university context (Thompson, 2013; Williams, 1995). Because these students were not (yet) enrolled in a matriculated, credit-bearing degree program, they did not see themselves as full-fledged members of the university community with whom American students would want to interact. As a result, these IEP students benefitted from the safety of the IEP community of practice, while at the same

time their interactions with (American) students in the larger university community may have been limited by their affiliation to the IEP.

Engagement in the IEP Classroom

In order to understand the role that this IEP played in the academic socialization of its students, it is essential to examine what students actually experienced while they were engaged in classroom instruction. Academic socialization is an inherently power-laden process during which students must negotiate their identities, culture, and understanding of knowledge (Morita, 2004). Consequently, the actions of the instructors and the students at this IEP must be considered in relation to one another in order to recognize the complex nature of this co-constructed process. In this section, I will first provide a brief description of the IEP classroom and the typical interactions that occurred in this instructional context. I will then discuss two trends that emerged from the data concerning students' classroom engagement: (a) The role of IEP instructors in providing explicit instruction on the expectations of American academia and (b) the function of the IEP classroom as a forgiving environment in which students were allowed to make mistakes.

The IEP at Fisher University is guided by a mission statement that puts forth the organization's purpose as to "provide high quality instruction and support to adult learners who want to increase their English language proficiencies to achieve academic, professional, and personal goals and to improve their understanding of the cultures of the United States." As the majority of IEP students have academic goals, a great number of the program's high-intermediate and advanced courses focus on academic skills (e.g., writing for academic purposes, advanced speaking and listening for academic purposes,

and research paper writing). Nevertheless, these academic skills do not exist in a vacuum and thus, American culture, and the culture of the American classroom, is embedded within all courses at Fisher's IEP. Aisha was a 32-year-old Saudi student who had enrolled in the IEP at Fisher University after already completing her Master's degree at an American University because she needed help gaining acceptance to a PhD program. When describing her experience at Fisher's IEP, Aisha focused on the academic nature of the classes, stating:

> I think, and I have told this to the other classmates, the IEP is very much academic. I've been to the other school with the English and they don't give us that good of an academic vocabulary as the IEP so I think the IEP—I will have a bunch of vocabulary. And the preparation for the GRE, writing statements—it will force me to do that because it is part of the homework so that is so useful.

Aisha, along with many other student participants, greatly valued the applications and admissions preparation that they were receiving in their courses and appreciated the more academic nature of the instructional environment at this IEP.

In order to understand how this academic nature manifested itself in the classroom, it is important to consider the structure and format of instruction in this program. Classes at Fisher's IEP have been designed to be largely student-centered in nature with the goals of the learners at the forefront of instruction. Accordingly, students at this IEP are required to participate frequently while engaged in classroom tasks and activities. IEP classes generally consist of between 12-16 students and the classrooms are physically oriented towards seminar-style instruction—the desks are usually situated in a semi-circle in order to facilitate interaction among students. Each IEP class lasts between 65 and 125 minutes per class meeting and meets four or five days every week. When I

observed different classes at the IEP, I witnessed a diversity in instructional styles and approaches to the given curriculum. Some instructors created a very relaxed classroom environment in which students bantered back and forth with the instructor and their classmates, while other instructors were a bit more formal in their classroom behaviors and attempted to create somewhat of a distance between themselves and their students. Nevertheless, the small class sizes and frequent class meetings tended to foster a sense of community in even the courses with the most formal instructors.

Explicit Instruction of Cultural Expectations

The feature that was most salient across courses and instructors throughout my class observations was the level of engagement and participation demonstrated by students. Students in these classes were not allowed to sit passively in the classes that I observed and were pushed to participate in a variety of activity types (e.g., pair, small group, whole class, etc.) during class instruction. Many students in the classes I observed seemed happy to comply with these expectations of class participation; however, some other students were less willing to participate. The instructors that I observed were generally not willing to let students "get away" with not participating and instead, instructors provided their students with explicit instruction on the expectations of participation in the American classroom. In one such instance from my field notes, I observed how an instructor addressed such nonparticipation in her 700 core course:

> The instructor asks students to get into small groups to complete a series of reading comprehension questions. After five minutes, the discussion among members of one of the groups comes to a halt, while the rest of the class is still engaged in the assigned activity. Several members of that group proceed to pull out their cell phones and disengage from the task at hand. In response to this behavior, the instructor immediately goes over to the group and asks them to report on their completion of the activity.

> When she discovers that this group of students have not fully finished the activity, she tells them that they aren't finished and gives them explicit steps to follow to complete the task. Another five minutes pass and everyone, including the group in question, seems to have finished discussing the questions. The instructor calls the class back together to review their groups' answers as a whole class. Before starting this review, the instructor takes a minute to remind the class of the importance of staying on task during group work and the classroom policy of not using cellphones for personal purposes during class time.

By addressing her students in this way, this instructor used students' inappropriate performance to create a teachable moment in which she could provide a brief lesson for all of her students of the norms of acceptable classroom behavior.

Throughout my observations, I saw instances similar to the one described above in which instructors found opportunities in their classes to provide students with explicit instruction on the norms and culture of American academia. Because academic socialization is such a complex process that is mediated by the power relationships inherent to the participants, I was unsure whether students would view their instructors' input positively or if they would see this as an unnecessary critique. Not all of the student participants who I interviewed directly discussed this aspect of their IEP instruction; however, those students who did raise the issue of explicit instruction on classroom expectations seemed to view this type of feedback in a positive light. As outsiders to American academia, these international students did not have access to the rules of participation within the classroom community of practice. According to Delpit (1988), a "culture of power" exists within the classroom and "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (p. 283). Thus, the student participants and students I observed seemed to appreciate this type of instruction as they found that "explicit presentation

makes learning immeasurably easier" (Delpit, 1988, p. 283). One such student was Youssef, a 26-year-old Saudi student applying to Master's degree programs in Pharmacology, who highlighted his appreciation for one particular instructor when describing his overall satisfaction with the IEP in the following quote:

> Some professors, like in 400, Rodrigo, he was a good person for those things [teaching us about American culture]. Most of our classes, it was the first time we came to the USA, so he was always giving advice on American culture. Our class was more than two hours so he managed those things and when we worked, I felt he was giving some information on American culture, life standards, what we should do—which was really helpful to us. I learned a lot from him because we cannot learn easily outside of the class because we need someone who can give us advice. Not every class can be possible for those things because of limited time. But, he was a great person for giving information about those things.

In this excerpt, Youssef emphasized how much he valued the cultural information he received from this particular instructor; pointing out that the advice the instructor provided could not be easily acquired outside of class. Several other student participants likewise discussed their appreciation for receiving explicit instruction on cultural expectations from their instructors. Moreover, student participants seemed to benefit from this instruction because it provided them with a forum to negotiate their understanding of the norms and expectations of the American classroom.

Many of the instructors I observed and interviewed were cognizant of the active role they played in supporting students' academic socialization. When asked what she does to prepare students for their subsequent academic studies, Beth, an instructor and advisor in the University Preparation Program, explained her role in students' academic socialization as follows:

> I try to foster learner autonomy. Talk about study skills, general study strategies, how the adult brain learns, why they need to do different kinds

> of review, how it is important that they take an active role in the class. [I] try to give them enough guidelines so they can succeed but not too many that I am holding their hand. I try to bridge that balance—talk to them about cultural implications of their behavior or requests or whatever kind of language that seems to come up that could be a teachable moment. But all in the service of learner autonomy.

In Beth's case, she was not focusing on discrete language or academic readiness skills when she conceptualized her role in students' academic preparation. Although I am sure that she was teaching her students these discrete skills, Beth turned her focus to the much larger challenges of fostering learner autonomy and informing students of the cultural implications behind their behaviors. Beth's ability to discuss her role in students' academic socialization may have been uniquely eloquent; however, my observations and interviews illuminated many other instructors who played a similar role in providing their students with this type of enculturation to the American classroom.

Fostering a Forgiving Environment for Learning

Classes at Fisher's IEP pushed many international students outside of their comfort zones by adopting an interactional approach to instruction. Despite this boundary pushing, my observational and interview data indicated that students perceived the IEP to be a forgiving environment where they are able to "learn the ropes" before entering into their mainstream university courses, which formerly enrolled students, such as Dastan, described as being considerably more overwhelming:

> When I had very huge lectures with cases, it was very different for me. In one of my lectures I couldn't understand an academic law word and when I opened the book I couldn't find this word, and the dictionary I couldn't find this word.

In contrast to such intimidating encounters with matriculated courses, student participants frequently described the IEP classroom as a supportive environment that provided them

with a secure environment in which they could enculturate into American academia. Akilah, a former IEP student enrolled in a Master's program in biotechnology, described the role that Fisher's IEP played in her academic trajectory by explaining:

> It definitely helped a lot. It helped just the fact with dealing with people in here [America]. I didn't get much of a cultural shock when I started because I was in an international environment before I came here when I was teaching [in Saudi Arabia]. But generally speaking, going back into a classroom—because I had been out of school for about two years before I came to the IEP, so being in a classroom setting… that helped me catch up because I felt slow since I haven't been in school for a while. I don't think I would do as well as I have been if it weren't for the IEP regardless of my English level. It just for me—the timing was perfect and I needed to be in a classroom again before I jumped back into a master's program.

In Akilah's case, studying at Fisher's IEP provided her with an intermediary setting as she eased back into the university classroom. Even though Akilah had entered the IEP as a highly proficient English speaker who did not feel that she "needed" explicit language support, she still found her time at the IEP to be valuable and partly attributed her success in her degree program to her preprogram studies at Fisher's IEP.

In order to understand what aspects of IEP instruction most contributed to the positive experiences students encountered in the IEP classroom, I analyzed the interview data for students' descriptions of their classroom instruction. This analysis revealed that students' appreciation was most connected to the fact that IEP classes provided them with a forum to negotiate their understanding of academic and cultural conventions of the American classroom. In terms of academic conventions, several student participants brought up the highly significant issue of academic citation and plagiarism (Li & Casanave, 2012). Students' discussion of this issue as central to the value they placed on their IEP studies was not surprising as instruction on academic citation conventions is

included in the curriculum of many courses at Fisher's IEP. In fact, I witnessed several instructors providing instruction on citation conventions, summarizing, and paraphrasing all in order to give students the tools necessary to avoid plagiarism. Rana, a former student from Saudi Arabia who had matriculated into an undergraduate program at Fisher University, described the academic writing skills that she had gained while studying at Fisher's IEP:

> I really liked the writing course I took with Sandra. It was a lot of fun because we read a lot of essays and talked it over. It was pretty similar to the courses I take. The classroom set up was very similar to the classes I take now so it was kind of a preview although the coursework was different. The research paper-writing course, even though for most students [from her Saudi university sponsor] don't like it at all, I liked it. I thought I learned how to actually do research. . . . But I do feel like I did learn about how to write an essay, how to research. I've always been a good writer, but my research wasn't always that good. I didn't really completely understand. I knew what plagiarism was, but I didn't know to what extent so I didn't realize that if I used one sentence the way it was phrased, that is technically plagiarism. I didn't realize and that helped me a lot.

Rana was perhaps the student participant with the highest English proficiency level and was the only student who had placed into the 800 level upon arrival to the IEP. In spite of her strong language ability, Rana still found her IEP writing courses helpful and necessary in preparing her for undergraduate studies. It was in these IEP courses that she had the opportunity to fail and learn from that failure so that by the time she was enrolled in her undergraduate program she was "more comfortable" writing essays and researching.

In addition to engaging in learning and negotiation of academic conventions, students also felt comfortable exploring broader cultural issues in the IEP classroom. Through my observations and interviews, I repeatedly saw and heard of instances in

which students made cultural mistakes in their IEP classes. The student participants that reported making such blunders said that they felt that they were allowed to make cultural mistakes in their IEP classes; a comfort that some students worried they would not experience in their matriculated courses. Alhusain, a formerly enrolled Turkish student who had matriculated into a Master's engineering program, described a particularly poignant issue of cultural misunderstanding that he encountered in one of his IEP courses:

> In United States, racism is prohibited. We should be aware of what we are presenting. We were trying to make presentation that time, certain products how they are successful or unsuccessful. We presented and [the instructor] said before presenting, maybe send to her our presentation. She replied to us—it was a great presentation and then she put down really politely, you need to change your subject because it includes some racist ideas. So we didn't know what she meant and we aren't familiar with American culture, also we are not native speakers, so at that time, I felt lots of problems. So she gave me a 0 on the presentation and a fail. I got the point—I should be aware of what I am doing and I should watch my language, how can we talk about certain topics? I failed that time. That is not really good, but I learned how to act in USA. So it was more experience, but good experience for having knowledge on sensitive subjects. I really hate racism but I didn't know those things meant certain things; I mean African Americans and some stuff. Sometimes you make a compliment but it's still racism. It was the worst, but good learning experience.

In this instance, the IEP instructor tried to guide Alhusain and his group members through the culturally embedded notion of what constitutes racist language. Despite the fact that Alhusain did not successfully revise his presentation based on this instructor's feedback and ultimately received a failing grade on the assignment, he still viewed this mistake as a good learning experience. Because he was able to make such an inherently dangerous misstep in the safety of his IEP classroom, Alhusain "learned how to act in the

USA" and was prevented from facing the consequences of making a similar mistake in one of his graduate courses.

IEP as a Gateway to the University

In examining students' participation in the IEP community of practice, the final theme that emerged from the data was the notion that the IEP at Fisher University, in some ways, was able to serve as a gateway to the larger university community. For the large majority of the student participants, Fisher's IEP was their first foray into an American classroom and, as such, the students viewed their experience studying at the IEP as an outlet to learn about the culture of American academia. Chi, a Chinese student who was interested in pursuing an MBA in the United States, described this experience of academic socialization in response to my question on how his IEP courses were preparing him for graduate studies by stating:

> Of course how the American education system works, you get a very good experience out of it. You choose your own classes, if you don't like the teacher you drop it, and there's the Internet system where you keep track of all your assignments and grades. You have to supervise yourself to finish homework.

In describing the preparation his IEP studies were affording him in these terms, Chi demonstrated an awareness of the broader academic and cultural knowledge that he was gaining through his IEP studies.

By functioning as a venue in which students could develop their academic speaking, writing, and knowhow, this IEP facilitated its students' academic socialization and providing them with the opportunity to participate peripherally (and legitimately on some occasions) in academic practices (Morita, 2004). Dastan, a former IEP student from Kazakhstan who had recently completed a yearlong Master of Laws program at

George Washington University at the time of the interview, described the role that Fisher's IEP played in acculturating him both to the United States and American academia by stating:

> I actually think the IEP opened my eyes for the United States. My first time in the United States was not when I came to [the city where Fisher is located], it was when I visited the embassy of Kazakhstan. But when I came to [the city where Fisher is located], when I came to the IEP at Fisher, in general and I really appreciate the IEP and all of my professors. . . . Fisher's IEP was *my first university* [added emphasis] and I will leave it all in my heart and the professors are always in my heart.

Although Dastan had already completed his undergraduate degree and worked for several years before enrolling in Fisher's IEP, he described Fisher as his "first university." By characterizing Fisher's IEP and his experience there in this way, Dastan's narrative illustrates the influential role that studying at an IEP can have in the academic socialization of such international students.

When examining this IEP and how it functioned in supporting students' academic socialization, it is important to consider the context of the program and where it is situated. The fact that Fisher's IEP is university-based and is housed in a central location on the university campus seemed to be important program features as they allowed the program to provide its students with a university experience. Saad, a 23-year-old Saudi student who was applying to Master's programs in finance, explained his positive impression of the academic atmosphere at Fisher's IEP by comparing it to other language programs. When asked about his overall satisfaction with studying at Fisher's IEP, Saad stated:

> I like it. It is a very professional environment. I feel like I'm in college, not in a language program. So many of my friends talk about other

> programs and other institutions, I feel that there are a lot of difference between Fisher's IEP and other institutions.

In this excerpt, Saad is attributing his satisfaction with the IEP at Fisher University to the fact that he felt like he was "in college" while he was studying in the program. This university atmosphere played a prominent role in other students' descriptions of their Fisher IEP experience as well. Khulood, the highly engaged Omani student, offered a similar narrative in describing Fisher's IEP: "I love the atmosphere, the classes, the teachers, the students, the overall ambiance of the whole program." When trying to understand the particular program features that attributed to the academic atmosphere of which students were so fond, Dastan provided another useful reflection on Fisher's IEP by describing it as follows:

> All of the opportunities throughout the university and then the campus was very good. The library was open 24/7. I spent most of my days in the library actually and gym, also and actually the student atmosphere, there were so many students from around the world. It helped me.

This description seems to confirm that the location of the IEP in a prestigious building in a central location on Fisher University's campus and the access to the university resources (e.g., library and gym) contributed to this atmosphere and a feeling of inclusion in the university community. Moreover, the multicultural nature of the international students enrolled in Fisher's IEP were also described as being "helpful" in this and other participants' accounts of the program. Altogether, these factors contributed to the generally positive academic atmosphere these students perceived and in turn, allowed Fisher's IEP to serve as a gateway to the American university experience.

Participation in the University Community (or Lack Thereof)

In order to fully explore students' academic socialization while studying at this IEP, I looked beyond their participation in the IEP itself and to students' direct participation in the larger university community of practice at Fisher. In doing so, I discovered that the need for IEP students to gain more access to the university community was a resounding echo across all participant groups. This finding was not entirely surprising; IEPs are known to stand at the periphery of the university (Williams, 1995). However, the desire for increased participation in the larger university community did not come in the form I had expected it would. I had anticipated that participants would focus on students' limited interaction with American and international students (other than those enrolled in the IEP, of course) and the socioemotional consequences resulting from that lack of interaction. Some student participants, as well as administrators and instructors, did express the longing for greater contact and connections between IEP students and the general student population of the university, as was evidenced in the previous sections. Alhusain, the former IEP student who had matriculated into a graduate program in engineering, expressed disappointment in the fact that he still only had one American friend after over two years in the United States and stated, "I believe IEP may need to help international students get closer to American students, but how? I don't know." Yet, developing these emotional relationships and engaging in university social activities was not generally at the epicenter of participants' concerns in regards to their participation in the university. Instead, most participants highlighted the impact that students' lack of experience with academic engagement in the

larger university community of practice had on the development of their academic readiness.

Two prominent themes emerged concerning students' limited academic participation in the greater university community. First, several students expressed the desire to take more credit-bearing courses and to be permitted to start enrolling in those courses earlier in the duration of their IEP studies. Second, there were repeated suggestions from students, administrators, and instructors who thought that students should be encouraged to conduct more observations of university course lectures during their time at the IEP. I will discuss each of these themes in turn below.

Enrollment in Credit-Bearing Courses

One of the promoted features of the University Preparation Program at the IEP is that it offers students the option to take an undergraduate credit course while still enrolled in the IEP. Students can take a wide range of courses offered throughout Fisher University's schools and colleges (e.g., calculus, geology, political science, organizational development, psychology, art design, etc.). This credit course option is not limited to a few, select courses. Instead, students are able to enroll in almost any undergraduate course offered at Fisher University. This option is available to students who have successfully completed at least one session at the advanced (800) level. While they are taking this credit course, these students are concurrently enrolled in three IEP advanced electives. Several student, instructor, and administrator participants reported the University Preparation credit course option to be a valuable program feature for those students who opt to take these courses because it provides these students with an opportunity to study alongside "normal" undergraduate students, earn academic credit,

and receive a course grade that they can include on their transcripts and application materials.

After hearing overwhelmingly positive feedback about taking credit courses from the University Preparation Program administrators and one of the first student participants I had interviewed, I made the decision to use purposeful sampling to identify several more student participants who had elected to take credit courses as part of the University Preparation Program. In all, I interviewed three current student participants and one former student participant who had elected to take advantage of this credit course option. Akilah, a former IEP student who was enrolled in a Master's program in biotechnology at the time of the interview, described her experience with taking a credit course while at the IEP as follows:

> I took Calculus. It was great actually. I got an A+ [laughs]. . . . I actually liked socializing. I liked being in a classroom and being on a campus, not just attending English classes. I think my favorite part was being able to take a class through the program and still be able to do both things.

The other student participants were similarly positive in their sentiments about the credit courses: Jiao, a Chinese student applying for admission to Master’s programs in Design, said that she “loved” the two credit courses she took and that they “were amazing;” Leizl, an Omani student applying for undergraduate admission, described the credit course she was taking as being “really helpful;” and Khulood, another student from Oman also preparing for undergraduate admission, expressed the benefits of taking a credit course as follows, “it gives you the perspective and hint of what U.S. universities are like.” These students appreciated that by opting to take a credit course while still enrolled in the IEP, they were able to gain greater insight into the American university classroom.

The demands of credit courses are inherently different from the courses offered at the IEP. Accordingly, all four student participants who had taken the credit course option discussed the differences between the credit courses they took and their IEP courses. Several of the student participants described the credit courses as having a heavier workload and requiring them to be more independent in completing their coursework than was needed in the IEP courses. Khulood explained that her Calculus credit course was different from her IEP courses because "more time and more effort is needed- more mental strength needed." Besides the more substantial course workload, enrolling in credit courses also provided these students with an opportunity to experience a deeper level of engagement in the larger university community. In a previously mentioned quote, Akilah clearly made a distinction between the types of university participation that the credit course afforded her versus the type of academic engagement that was offered to her by the English classes she took at the IEP. When she states that she "liked being in a classroom and being on a campus, not just attending English classes," one would assume that the IEP courses are not conducted on campus. However, this is certainly not the case as IEP courses are held in buildings that are physically located on campus and, as mentioned previously, most IEP courses at Fisher University are held in a prominent building centrally located on the university's campus. Nonetheless, Akilah felt, perhaps rightly, that the credit courses provided her the opportunity to engage in more legitimate participation in the university community than did her enrollment in the IEP courses.

It is unfortunate that despite the benefits the participants reported of the credit course program option, including the opportunity for university engagement that these courses provide and the academic skills and readiness gained, few IEP students actually

take advantage of the credit course option. In the fall of 2015, for example, only five IEP students (1.7%) were enrolled in these credit courses. The most obvious reason for such low student participation in this credit course program is that the prerequisite requirement (i.e., having successfully completed at least one session at the advanced level) makes the vast majority of IEP students ineligible to take advantage of this option in any given session. During that same fall 2015 session, for example, this prerequisite requirement excluded 83% of all IEP students (i.e., students enrolled in levels 100 through 700 and those students in their first session at the 800 level) from taking a credit course. This does not mean that those students would never have the opportunity to take a credit course in future sessions; simply that they were not eligible to take a credit course during that particular session. Nonetheless, there is still a large gap between the 17% of IEP students who were enrolled in their second session at the 800 level and thus, were eligible to opt into the credit course program and the only 1.7% of students who actually chose this option.

The question then arises as to why more eligible students do not take advantage of this credit course option. Is it simply that students do not know about this program feature? Or is it that they are unaware of the benefits they could receive as a result electing to take a credit course? Or is it that students feel unprepared and are intimidated by the level of English needed and the heavier workload that they may encounter in these credit courses? According to Lauren, the University Preparation advising specialist who oversees the credit course program option, the low enrollment in the credit course program option can be attributed to two factors. First, opting to take a credit course while enrolled in the IEP is expensive; electing this program feature increases tuition by about

31%. Consequently, most sponsors (including the sponsor who sends the largest number of students to the IEP) will not pay for their students to take this credit course option, which leaves only students from a select group of sponsors and self-paying students with the financial means necessary to take credit courses while studying at the IEP at Fisher University. Lauren described the second factor responsible for these low enrollment numbers by stating the following:

> The other issue is that it takes some pretty advanced preparation. Our sessions are half-semester, so our students can only start a credit course every other session and have to commit to the course for two IEP sessions. So, sometimes the timing for the students in 800 doesn't match with the start/end of the credit courses. For example, students might come in the Fall 1 and want to take a course, but it's too late because Fall courses have already started. Students who want to take Spring semester have to be completing their applications in the beginning/middle of Fall 2, and probably be planning on it Fall 1, and then have to commit to it past Spring 2. So it only works for students who are here for several sessions.

The complex timing and required planning that are involved in the enrollment in a credit course is thus another substantial barrier that prevents eligible students from taking advantage of this University Preparation Program option.

Based on these interview data, there seem to be three primary obstacles that prevent more students from electing the credit course option offered by the University Preparation Program: (a) the prerequisite level requirement, (b) the increased tuition cost, and (c) the complicated timing and involved scheduling required. None of the student participants commented on the second or third obstacles; however, two of the four student participants did perceive the prerequisite requirement to be needlessly stringent. Jiao, the only student participant who actually took two credit courses—an art design and psychology course—expressed her frustration at not being able to take a credit course

sooner by stating that she "was eager to go. So I found Linda [the University Preparation Program Manager] and told her a lot of times—almost every day, every day—morning, afternoon, I told her, 'I really want to go.' " Consequently, Jiao suggested that IEP students should be able to start taking credit courses much earlier; perhaps at the 600 level. Khulood, who was taking a calculus course for credit, also brought up this issue when I asked if there was anything else that she wanted to add before we finished our interview. She shared:

> When it comes to English in the credit courses, the language is not really that difficult, so I think students from 700 should be able to take a credit class, not just 800. I think they would be able to handle the workload and English spoken in the class. Because mainly the language used there is scientific with mathematical terms, so they should be able to handle it.

In response to Khulood's suggestion, I asked if she thought this only applied to STEM courses, to which she was not entirely certain, but then she suggested, "I think it would be a good idea to let students have a chance to go to a credit class and get the hang of a class and see if they are able to apply to them or not." In this case, Khulood was suggesting that the IEP should provide students at lower proficiency levels with the opportunity to conduct firsthand observations of these credit classes so that they would then be able to make the determination themselves as to whether they could handle the demands of a specific credit-bearing course. These student participants saw both the immense value in taking these courses as well as the importance of giving students more agency and decision-making power over decisions concerning their own academic readiness.

Observation of University Lectures

Throughout my interviews with students, instructors, and administrators, another suggestion concerning students' academic socialization and engagement within the larger university community kept emerging: IEP students should observe more university courses. This recommendation is closely aligned with the perceived value participants placed on taking a credit course while studying at the IEP. However, since so few students are able to take advantage of the credit course option, observation of university lectures is seen by many IEP instructors and administrators as the next best option. As such, several of the instructor and administrator participants I interviewed identified the need for IEP students to conduct more observations of university lectures as a program deficit needing to be addressed.

It should be noted that the university observations students did conduct while at the IEP were mentioned repeatedly as something that student participants found helpful in preparing them for their future studies; however, administrator and instructor participants felt that students were just not conducting enough of these observations during their IEP studies. Observing university lectures is actually a component of the IEP curriculum: one of the intermediate electives offered at the 600/700 level in the IEP that focuses on listening skills for academic lectures requires that students complete three outside lectures as courses assignments and one of these must be the observation of a university class lecture. This course supports students in setting up these lecture observations by instructing students on how to navigate the online university course roster so that they are able to identify specific courses (including sections, instructors, and times) that they would like to observe. In addition, this course offers even more

concrete support to assist students in conducting these observations by providing them with an email template (see Appendix E) that they can use to send to a professor to request a class observation. By incorporating these provisions into the course structure, this listening strategies course actually gives students an opening to allow them access into the university classroom, a feat which would otherwise seem inaccessible to most IEP students.

The lecture observations that students completed in the listening to lectures course were highlighted by study participants as a very valuable course assignment from which students tended to receive great insight and enrichment. Beth, an instructor and advisor in the University Preparation Program, described the observation component of this course as "great- I have gotten really great feedback from students. They just come up to me after I have taught them and say, 'That was the best class.' They really did improve their listening." When asked what she thought were the most useful IEP courses for academically bound students, Amanda, the IEP Manager, highlighted the importance of the lecture listening skills course. She described the benefits of this course by explaining "students really utilize the homework of going to lectures and sitting in. It gives them a better sense of what's to come." The perceived value of this course and, in particular, the lecture observations that it requires students to complete was widespread across the IEP at Fisher University. Even though he does not actually teach any IEP courses, I asked the University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist, Evan, which courses he had heard from students were particularly successful at preparing them for their academic coursework. Throughout his advising and informal conversations with students, Evan

said that the course he had heard most "good things" about was the listening skills for lectures course and Evan went on to explain:

> I think that students find the listening to lectures course valuable. I think the biggest part of that is the exposure- when they are forced to go into a classroom and seeing the speed in particular. I think that is really interesting for them. That is probably the one [course] I hear the most about.

In fact, listening to lectures was the course most frequently cited by participants as being particularly helpful in preparing students for their subsequent academic studies. When asked why they felt this course was so useful, participants largely attributed the success of this course to its lecture observation requirement.

It was not only the administrator and instructor participants who highlighted the usefulness of this course and the lecture observations; several student participants also listed this course as one of the most useful they had taken while studying at the IEP. One such student was Alhusain, a former IEP student who had matriculated into a graduate program in engineering. Alhusain highlighted this course as "a really great class to help. [The instructor] showed us how we can prepare for real lectures, how-to steps, organize, how we can make presentations, which were really helpful for me now when I try to make my presentations." As a former student, Alhusain was able to reflect on the ways in which he has been able to apply the skills he learned in this course to his graduate studies. He also described the observations he conducted while taking this class as "really helpful" as they were the first time he saw a "real American class." The overwhelming value that students attributed to this course and the lecture observations that the course required them to conduct demonstrated that this course was filling an

unmet need: Students desired more academic engagement with the greater university community.

Despite the positive feedback given to these observations of university lectures, the consensus among participants who discussed these observations was that students should have more opportunities to conduct such observations as part of the IEP curriculum. When asked if she had anything more to add at the end of our interview, Agata, an experienced instructor who had taught at the IEP for seven years, brought up the idea of incorporating more observations into the IEP course curricula:

> I think we do so much. I honestly feel often if they only took it to heart and listened. I sometimes feel that we try so hard and they listen perhaps and they understand, but it is not until they actually experience it. So I sometimes have this idea: What if we have them observe two classes per session and see this is what I'll have to do, this is what will be expected of me, this is the level of participation that will be expected of me. Sometimes I walk past classrooms in the English department and I say they should see this. They should see—maybe that would be a good wake-up call or bring it home. . . . That would be one thing, if at all realistic, because I feel we do so much. I don't know what else we could do. That would be a great introduction. If they sit during the class, their jaw drops. It sinks in. How would I participate here?

In this excerpt, Agata described her frustration with the limitations she faced in preparing her IEP students for the academic reality they would later encounter in their degree programs. Although much of the IEP course curricula is meant to simulate the expectations and experiences of an academic course (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015), Agata points out that these IEP classes are not an adequate substitution for the "real" university classroom. Furthermore, the one lecture observation that is incorporated into the IEP curricula through the listening to lectures course was thought to be not nearly enough exposure by the participants of this study. Amanda, the IEP Manager, expressed the need

for “an advanced version of the lecture listening course where there is a note taking class at the 800 level and the material is a bit more challenging.” By advocating for the creation of a subsequent version of this course, Amanda echoed Agata’s sentiment in hoping that the IEP could provide students with increased opportunities to observe more university courses. These two suggestions were the most concrete that I encountered in my interviews; however, other participants also expressed the general desire for more opportunities for observations. By incorporating more of these authentic university observations into the IEP curricula, the underlying hope of these participants seems to be to give IEP students an opportunity to increase their genuine engagement with the Fisher University community.

Conclusion

This chapter described the findings related to this study’s first research question: What role do IEPs play in the academic socialization of international students throughout the university applications, admissions, and enrollment processes? An investigation of students’ participation in the IEP community and the larger university community of practice indicated that IEPs can support students' academic socialization by offering students opportunities for authentic academic engagement. Participation in IEP organized social activities, social interactions with IEP classmates, and explicit classroom instruction on cultural and academic expectations all facilitated students’ engagement in the IEP community of practice. With its central location on Fisher University’s campus and the access it afforded students to university resources, this IEP was able to largely function as a gateway to the American university experience. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that participants were concerned that students’ limited academic participation in

the greater university community would negatively impact students' academic readiness. As a result, the need for IEP students to gain more access to genuine academic engagement within the larger university community of practice was highlighted by participants.

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS PROCESS SUPPORT

The majority of academically bound international students at Fisher University's IEP complete the applications and admissions process to attend undergraduate or graduate degree programs during the time that they are enrolled at Fisher's IEP. The college choice process has long been conceptualized as a multistage process involving students' predispositions to university study, the search for programs to which to apply, and the ultimate choice of which program to attend (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Although students' predispositions to attend an American university have usually been established long before they arrive at Fisher's IEP, these students generally undergo the search and choice stages while studying at Fisher. Many aspects of this college choice process are not universal, but are instead specific to the context of American academia. Accordingly, the IEP at Fisher University provides its students with assistance to support them throughout the uniquely American university applications and admissions process.

In order to explore the role of the IEP in the college choice process, this chapter addresses the second research question in this study: What supports do IEPs provide students during the applications and admissions process and how closely aligned is this support with students' needs and expectations? To address this research question, I investigated participants' perceptions of the formal applications and admissions support features offered by the University Preparation Program, as well as any informal program support that was provided by instructors in assisting academically bound students with

the applications and admissions process. Embarking upon this study, I was aware that not all students enrolled at Fisher's IEP take full advantage of the resources available to them throughout the applications and admissions process. However, the findings from this study revealed that all 17 of the student participants interviewed had, in fact, utilized some aspect of the formal applications and admissions support offered through the University Preparation Program. Further, participants' descriptions of their experiences suggest that this IEP provides sufficient applications and admissions support to its academically bound students who do choose to utilize the resources available to them through the University Preparation Program. According to the students who participated in this study, the one-on-one advising provided by University Preparation Program advisors was identified to be the most valuable form of such formal support. On the other hand, the IEP instructors themselves were found to play only a peripheral role in assisting their students through the college choice process. These findings are explored in turn in this chapter to elucidate how these themes emerged from the data.

University Preparation Program Support

The University Preparation Program is the formal structure of applications and admissions support that is provided to academically bound IEP students at Fisher University. This program functions as a track of study within the IEP and it is intended to support all academically bound students enrolled in the IEP as they undergo the college-going process. In addition to providing applications and admissions support, the University Preparation Program also strives to prepare these students for the rigorous coursework they will ultimately face in their undergraduate or graduate degree programs. When considering how effective this IEP is at helping students gain admission to degree

programs, it is useful to first briefly describe the types of institutions to which the student participants were admitted. Table 7 provides a summary of the universities that the former student participants were attending, as well as listing the universities to which the current students were admitted and planning to attend. Unfortunately, four of the current student participants are not included in Table 7 as those students did not reply to the follow-up email that I sent regarding their admissions decisions. Nonetheless, the university admissions and enrollment data displayed in Table 7 illustrates the high caliber of universities to which the student participants gained admission and a high rate of overall admissions success, with only one student participant reporting that he had to abandon his academic plans in the United States and return to his home country.

Table 7

Student Participants' University Admissions and Enrollment

Student	IEP Status	University Attending	University Acceptance
Akilah	Former	Jefferson University	
Alhusain	Former	Drexel University	
Dastan	Former	George Washington University	
Kamilah	Former	La Salle University	
Rana	Former	Fisher University*	
Abdul	Current		Cornell University
Aisha	Current		University of Kansas
Ingrid	Current		Fordham University
Jiao	Current		Fisher University*
Khulood	Current		Lehigh University
Leizl	Current		Northeastern University
Mustafa	Current		University of Missouri
Youssef	Current		Scholarship Terminated-Returned to Saudi Arabia

*The pseudonym is used here to maintain the anonymity of the research site.

In order to better understand the efficacy of this program model in supporting students through the college choice process, it is important to investigate both the broad views of the effectiveness of the program as well as the particular aspects of the University Preparation Program that participants found to be most and least useful. In the following sections, I first present an overview of the participants' general perceptions of the University Preparation Program and then move on to discuss each of the four primary program features and their perceived efficacy across the participant groups.

General Perceptions of the University Preparation Program

The belief that the University Preparation Program at Fisher University provides IEP students with a valuable support structure as they undertake the applications and admissions process was repeatedly echoed by administrator, instructor, and student participants. Throughout the interview data, participants frequently described the University Preparation Program in positive terms, while highlighting the usefulness of the resources offered by the program. Some of this satisfaction was expressed in quite general terms—especially by the student participants. For example, Aisha, a Saudi student applying for admission to a PhD program, described the University Preparation Program as "very much helpful," while Ingrid, a French student applying for undergraduate admissions, similarly labelled the program as "very useful." Other student participants likewise expressed their general satisfaction with the University Preparation Program, but did so with more hyperbole. Leizl, an Omani student applying for undergraduate admission, was one such student who placed great emphasis on the support she received from the program when she stated "we couldn't have done it without them [the University Preparation Program team]." While conducting the interviews with

participants from all three participant groups, I was struck by such bold praise of the University Preparation Program and its staff.

After completing the student interviews for this study, I found that all 17 of the student participants had taken advantage of at least one feature of the University Preparation Program; a finding that quite frankly, surprised me. Prior to collecting the data for this study, I had anticipated that I would encounter several student participants who had not made use of the University Preparation Program resources. This expectation was based on administrators and instructors' anecdotal accounts of academically bound students "falling through the cracks" and either not knowing about the resources that were available to them through the University Preparation Program or simply choosing not to utilize the available program resources. However, such cases did not reveal themselves in the student participant data.

When analyzing student participants' general perceptions of the University Preparation Program, the data indicate that all but one student participant expressed positive opinions about the program. The student participant who did not reflect positively on his experience with the program was Badir, an Omani student preparing to apply to undergraduate degree programs. Badir, who was at the 500 level at the time of our interview and was thus, the least proficient student participant, had attended two University Preparation advising sessions at the urging of his government sponsor. He went to these sessions with the broad purpose of gaining knowledge about the application process, but said that these two sessions were not very helpful because according to Badir, "I [knew] this information before I came here and also because I didn't write my essay and [then] come in." Despite this initial negative experience with the University

Preparation Program resources, Badir was not completely discouraged with the program and said that he planned to attend future advising sessions when he had written a draft of his application essay(s). Consequently, it is possible that this student may have ultimately had a more helpful experience when he later received additional support from program resources as he became more actively engaged in the applications and admissions process. Badir's experience indicates that targeting the University Preparation Program resources at students in the 600 level or higher who are actively engaged in the admissions process may indeed be an appropriate approach, as this less proficient student—who had not yet begun his applications—did not report receiving much benefit from the program support.

Another finding that the student interview data revealed was that several students described their satisfaction with the University Preparation Program by contrasting the support they received in the program with the lack of value they placed on their general English language studies in the IEP. By making this comparison, these student participants were attributing greater worth to the college-going knowledge and institutional support that they received in the University Preparation Program than they did to the linguistic and academic skills that they were developing in their general IEP courses. Rana, a former student from Saudi Arabia who had matriculated into an undergraduate program at Fisher University, summarized her overall experience at the IEP as follows: "I don't really know about the English portion of it, but the admissions support was great!" Sentiments such as these indicate that students were able to clearly discern how the resources offered by the University Preparation Program supported them throughout the applications and admissions process. In contrast, the linguistic skills and

academic readiness developed in the general IEP courses was not always so easy for students to identify and relate to their long-term academic goals. Instructor and administrator participants also commented on this trend, which they found to be concerning and at times, extremely frustrating. The fact that many Fisher IEP students focused more on the value of the applications and admissions support they received through the University Preparation Program at the expense of the language instruction they were receiving was an important finding that will be explored at length in the next chapter.

Administrator and instructor participants represented their positive impressions of the University Preparation Program in somewhat different terms than those expressed by the student participants. Instead of hyperbolic general statements or contrasting the program's value with that offered by the IEP's English courses, the instructors and administers tended to focus their accolades on the more specific resources offered by the University Preparation Program and the concrete benefits that resulted from students' participation in those resources. Jamie, an instructor who had been working at Fisher's IEP for 14 years at the time of the interview, framed her positive perception of the support offered by the University Preparation Program in terms of the program's growth:

> I think this is the most amazing program. I don't know what else is out there but I'd be surprised if they could be as good as Fisher. I mean the way the University Preparation Program has grown—with the courses, the workshops, the individual counseling, and the number of teachers that are working in this area—there's just so many. [An adjunct lecturer who was providing one-on-one advising] is up there, and Beth is full time in the University Preparation Program. I think just a lot of emphasis has gone into that area and it seems to be really working well.

The University Preparation Program had, in fact, expanded in recent years with the addition of two new full-time administrative positions (i.e., Lauren and Linda), the reallocation of a full-time instructor to serve primarily as an advisor and instructor of the University Preparation Program courses (i.e., Beth), and the assignment of adjunct instructors to provide additional one-on-one advising sessions during the peak application season. Fisher's IEP had devoted more organizational resources to the University Preparation Program in order to meet the needs of it increasingly academically oriented student population and this program expansion had, evidently, not gone unnoticed by the instructors of the general IEP courses at Fisher.

Several administrator and instructor participants took a outcomes-oriented approach in their assessment of the University Preparation Program. Amanda, the IEP manager at Fisher, discussed the value of the University Preparation Program by explaining how the program's resources could help students meet their academic goals:

> I think students who take the University Preparation Program seriously—the ones who utilize the resources available, and are realistic about their goals and who make a good choice about a university in terms of what fits them—they are successful.

In this way, Amanda directly related the efficacy of the program to the academic success of its students. Evan, the University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist, similarly focused on student results in describing his experience with helping students at Fisher with the applications and admissions process. In the following excerpt, Evan portrayed the support services offered to Fisher IEP students through the University Preparation Program as being particularly effective in helping them navigate the college choice process and unique from other programs:

> My experience has been great because I think that we are really providing our students with a pretty tremendous and unique service. I like to tell myself that Fisher students are better off in the long run and are hopefully more successful in their studies. We do hear from students who have gone through and that has been the case. There have been very few times where we've heard from students that say, "No, I hate the school I went to. I'm failing out of the school I went to. It is not what I wanted." The experience [working in the University Preparation Program] has been great because I think we are doing good work that has had actual impact.

By focusing on how the support provided by the University Preparation Program resources was associated with student outcomes, these administrators and instructors expressed their belief that most students who took advantage of those program resources would ultimately achieve their academic goals.

Finally, several participants compared the support students were provided within the University Preparation Program at Fisher University to that offered at other IEP's when describing their general satisfaction with the University Preparation Program. Alhusain, a former IEP student from Turkey who had matriculated into a graduate program in engineering at the time of the interview, compared the support he had received at Fisher University to that which other students from his government scholarship program were given access to at different IEPs:

> We made résumé with Evan, so I told my friends who were taking the English courses from different places—as I told you there were 10 choices [of IEPs to attend]. They were really struggling with their statements and résumés because we don't know the American system and don't really have any experience. They told me they don't have those University Preparation Program people, so one of the best things for the IEP is the University Preparation Program and the advising. . . . I believe anyone trying to get an acceptance to a U.S. university—they should get this advantage.

By comparing the support he received in the University Preparation Program at Fisher University to that received by his peers at other institutions, Alhusain was both praising

the admissions assistance he had access to while at the same time identifying this type of support as a needed resource that is absent from the IEPs at other institutions. Other students made similar statements of contrast, including Abdul, a student from Saudi Arabia who was applying to graduate Law programs, who stated:

> I know lots of friends that are studying English at different universities and institutions and I think Fisher is doing a really good job with the University Preparation Program. It's something so unique. One of my friends is studying English at [an Ivy League University], which is a really good school. He doesn't know how does the structure look and write a résumé and so I showed him mine and showed him how to organize.

In the case of Abdul, he was actually outsourcing the information he learned through the University Preparation Program to support friends at other institutions who were not receiving these admissions supports.

Comparisons between the supports offered by the University Preparation Program at Fisher University to those offered by other IEPs were also made by some of the administrator and instructor participants, who similarly pointed out the uniqueness of the University Preparation Program. Emily, a full-time instructor, made such a comparison when discussing the supports students receive to help them navigate the applications and admissions process.

> Because I've worked at other universities, comparatively I think we provide students with a lot of access to resources and individual feedback. It seems to be, especially what the Middle Eastern students like, is individual feedback. I can't really think of something else that we could do.

In this way, Emily was both contrasting Fisher to other IEPs, while highlighting the benefit of the program's resources. In particular, Emily concentrated on the benefits associated with the individualized support that the University Preparation Program

provides to academically bound students. Beth, an instructor and advisor in the University Preparation Program, echoed this sentiment. During her interview, Beth made a similar comparison between Fisher's IEP and other IEPs she had worked at when describing her frustration about the fact that many academically bound students at Fisher's IEP do not make full use of the applications and admissions support available to them through the University Preparation Program:

> At any other IEP I've worked at—by far, we have the most administration support for staff and students. And I know staff takes advantage of it, but the students don't seem to. [Not] in the numbers they should, given how big our population [of academically bound students] is.

These examples all serve to demonstrate the fact that many students, instructors, and administrators at Fisher's IEP believed that the University Preparation Program was unique in the support it offered its academically bound students.

As a program administrator in this IEP, I was certainly glad to hear these overwhelmingly positive sentiments of satisfaction from participants reflecting on their experience with the University Preparation Program. However, with the exception of a few small details, the participants' general praise of the program did not provide the type of insight necessary to identify the elements or characteristics of the program that students actually found most useful. In order to gain a more in depth understanding of the efficacy of this program, I investigated participants' experiences with and participation in each of the four primary University Preparation Program features. It is important to note that the three participant groups described the utility of the program in somewhat divergent terms and were certainly not in complete accord as to which program features were most useful for students. Due to this disagreement across

participant groups and the fact that this investigation focused on how these supports were meeting students' needs and expectations, I chose to present the four program features according to students' perceptions of utility in order from the feature students found the most to least valuable: (a) one-on-one advising sessions, (b) University Preparation courses, (c) the credit course option, and (d) open information sessions. In the pages that follow, I present a brief description of each of these program features and then explore the varied participant perceptions concerning these four program resources.

One-on-One Advising Sessions

The University Preparation Program provides its students the opportunity to attend one-on-one advising sessions that are offered by several members of the University Preparation Program team. These sessions are intended to afford students with an individualized opportunity to discuss their academic plans, general admissions and applications questions, application essays or statements, résumés or curriculum vitae, and any other pertinent questions or concerns that they may have. Each advising session is scheduled for 30 minutes and students are permitted to register for one session with each advisor per week. There are three primary members of the University Preparation team that serve as advisors: Linda, the University Preparation Program Manager; Evan, the University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist; and Lauren, the University Preparation Advising Specialist. All three of these full-time program administrators conduct one-on-one advising sessions with students. As the manager of the program, Linda has a more limited role in advising, while both Evan and Lauren conduct a substantial number of advising sessions every session. The primary difference between Evan's and Lauren's roles lies in the fact that Evan focuses slightly more on students'

college choice decisions due to his experience working as an admissions counselor, while Lauren draws upon her TESOL background to support students with their application statements and essays. However, students are often unaware of this distinction or simply prefer to have one sole advisor and thus, both Lauren and Evan ultimately serve all advising needs in their sessions. During peak application season (i.e., the end of the fall 2 session) two or three other full-time instructors (i.e., Beth) and adjunct lecturers also conduct these advising sessions to ensure that students have enough access to this advising support as application deadlines approach. That said, there are times when a combination of six administrators and instructors are available to conduct advising sessions and thus, students could potentially attend three hours (*six* sessions) of one-on-one advising each week!

Of the four University Preparation Program features, student participants overwhelmingly attributed the greatest value to the one-on-one advising sessions that they attended. Sixteen of the 17 student participants had attended at least one of these advising sessions, which were frequently described by student participants as the "most helpful" aspect of the University Preparation Program. The notion that the one-on-one advising sessions were a useful support was also offered by administrators and instructors; however, there was a lesser degree of enthusiasm and emphasis placed on this program feature among participants in these groups. In contrast, numerous student participants extolled the help the advising sessions offered them and the concrete assistance with their applications that they received in these sessions. Akilah, a former IEP student enrolled in a Master's program in biotechnology, identified the advising sessions as the highlight of her Fisher experience and explained:

> I think what made my experience in the IEP a lot greater was working with Lauren on all these different aspects that were not necessarily classroom based, but more towards doing my application work because it was a lot of one-on-one time.

The data analysis illuminated several possible reasons for the accolades students ascribed to the advising support they received in the University Preparation Program: (a) The advising sessions offered students individualized attention, (b) students developed interpersonal relationships with advisors, and (c) the advisors managed student expectations with direct feedback. These three reasons are each described in turn below.

Individualized Attention

First and perhaps most obviously, the students greatly appreciated the individualized attention that they received during these advising sessions. Chi, a Chinese student interested in pursuing an MBA in the United States, described the advising sessions he attended as "one of the most helpful parts in the program because you have to get personalized opinions on yourself and you can ask questions." This sentiment was echoed throughout my interviews with students and even emerged in response to questions about the usefulness of other University Preparation Program features. In one such instance, I had asked Alhusain, a former IEP student who had matriculated into a graduate program in engineering, whether he had attended any University Preparation Program open information sessions. In response to this question about University Preparation workshops, Alhusain commented:

> I had been a couple of times but I didn't feel they were really beneficial. Honestly because [when] I visited Beth, I could have it directed to whatever I want. One-on-one advising was a lot more helpful [than the workshops] because after a few times of visiting, she knew me. So she knows my needs, which is great to have some quick information.

In this regard, Alhusain was alike many of the other student participants who appreciated the personalized nature of the one-on-one advising sessions because they found these sessions to be the most efficient means of receiving the college choice information and support they needed.

Administrator and instructor participants also commented on the value students associated with receiving personalized feedback in the one-on-one advising sessions. Linda, the University Preparation Program Manager, responded to my question about particularly effective aspects of the University Preparation Program by highlighting the individualized nature of the program's advising:

> I think the one-on-one advising we offer is really effective and unique, especially now that we have increased our capacity and have more advisers. . . . I think students who take advantage of one-on-one advising and come regularly—the improvement that they make is really significant. . . . A lot of them I really think they wouldn't get into some of the schools that they eventually do get into and I think it is the one-on-one nature of the advising. You can see the students who take advantage of this individual support that make so much more progress.

Consequently, the personal attention that students received in these advising sessions was viewed by members of all three participant groups to be a reason why students so valued these sessions. Further, this administrator participant made an explicit connection between this "individual support" and students' progress in achieving their admissions goals.

Interpersonal Relationship Development

The second reason to emerge from the interview and observational data was that students valued these advising sessions so greatly in large part due to the interpersonal relationships that they had developed with the University Preparation Program advisors

through engagement in those sessions. Several of the student participants explained that they had first formed a relationship with a University Preparation Program advisor when that advisor had served as their instructor in a University Preparation Program writing course. After those courses had ended, such students chose to continue to work with that advisor in one-on-one advising sessions. Ingrid, a French student applying for undergraduate admissions, was one such student. Ingrid had first worked with Beth when she was Ingrid's instructor in the university application essay course and she explained that she had continued to work with Beth in weekly advising sessions after that course had ended. When I asked if she met with other University Preparation Program advisors or if she always met with Beth, Ingrid replied:

> Always with Beth. I'm going to meet others too but I want to finish a lot of other essays because I want something clear to show to the other advisers here. But Beth, because thanks to this class, she knows exactly what I want to do and say, so it is easier to work with someone who knows me.

Thus, the establishment of an interpersonal relationship with one advisor made the student feel more comfortable in her interactions with that advisor, while also making the advising process more efficient as there was a sense of familiarity with the student's goals and needs. Alhusain, the former IEP student who had matriculated into a Master's program in engineering, described a similar experience in establishing an advising relationship with Beth. Alhusain explained that "Beth was my person. She helped a lot. She's my favorite one." When I asked him how and why he had established such a strong relationship with this advisor, Alhusain replied:

> First, I took from her the class—was the Writing the Graduate Application Statement. We knew each other from that class and I feel she was like my big sister. After that, I visited her a lot. As always, she motivated me

> really positively with my applications and sometimes when we were trying to put something on my statement—alone sometimes I really feel difficulties about what can I put, but when I talk to her, we can figure out what to put based on our conversations.

In addition, the University Preparation courses seemed to work in conjunction with the one-on-one advising, as students formed relationships with their instructors in those courses and then continued to receive support from those same individuals in subsequent advising sessions.

Even in cases where the advising relationship had not been established in a classroom setting, student participants tended to form an allegiance to one particular advisor. In the case of Akilah, the former IEP student who had enrolled in a Master's program in biotechnology, she described the support she received in her advising sessions with Lauren as follows:

> Yeah, I did that [advising sessions] more than anything. It was very helpful. To be more specific, Lauren was very helpful because I did try other people and they were not quite as helpful. She would set up follow-up meetings. She would motivate me to have a deadline for things even way before my actual deadline. She helped out with recommendation letters for a couple of applications. She helped with University Preparation Program where I did the class through the credit course option.

After "trying out" several of the University Preparation Program advisors, Akilah found the advisor that was the best fit for her and then made the decision to stick with that advisor. These participants' reflections highlight the emotional bonding that occurred between the students and their advisors, which aligns with the notion that language learning is an emotional process and not solely a cognitive endeavor (Swain, 2013). Based on the importance these students placed on not only the advising sessions, but on

the advisors themselves, the establishment of interpersonal relationships with these advisors was an important factor in the worth students' attributed to this program feature.

Several of the University Preparation Program administrators that I interviewed also highlighted the importance of developing interpersonal relationships with the students that they were advising. When asked about her role in assisting academically bound students, Lauren, the University Preparation Program advising specialist, described the importance of making connections with students in her advising sessions:

> Lauren: I think that it is helpful to connect with a student and do this [get students to think in more general terms about the college choice process] with them and they do better. And to inform them about everything they need to know and be there for them with appointments and get them through the process—advise them based on their strengths and weaknesses as they go.
>
> Sarah: Do you think forming personal relationships with students is really important in getting them through the process?
>
> Lauren: It depends on the student. I think some students come in and are lost, not just in the process, but also in life. And they look like they need a hug and not that I hug my students, but they need more of a personal connection. Some students that is just not appropriate. Some benefit from more like asking them about their day and other things and they really appreciate that.

In this excerpt, Lauren makes a distinction between the types of personal relationships that she formed with the students she was advising. Although Lauren claimed that some students need more of a personal connection than others, I would argue that these advisors are forming interpersonal relationships with even those students who they are just "asking them about their day." The value of these interpersonal relationships does not always lie in serving as an emotional support for students, but instead can be

understood as the development of a professional relationship that allows students the guidance they need to reach their academic goals.

Management of Student Expectations with Direct Feedback

The third explanation to emerge from the data as to why students placed the most value on the advising sessions was that the advisors were able to manage students' expectations and give them direct, and sometimes blunt, feedback on the applications and admissions process during the advising sessions. This role in managing students' college choice process was most witnessed in my observations of advising sessions. For example, I observed an advising session between Beth and a Saudi student who was working on her graduate applications. During this advising session, Beth counseled the student on the merit of some of her college choice decisions:

> Beth asks the student for an update on her list of schools she is planning to apply to—in their last meeting Beth had apparently asked the student to narrow down her list. The student pulls out a lengthy list of university programs and Beth immediately tells the student that her list of 17 universities is still too long. The student begins to explain that she has already removed two universities from her list, but Beth interrupts and says that it will not be possible for the student to complete successful applications for all of the programs on her list. Beth then goes through the student's list and asks the student pointed questions about each university and why she wants to attend that program. She convinces the student that two of the universities on her list (Columbia and Stanford) are not realistic choices given her current TOEFL score. Beth gets the student to agree to removing four more universities from her list and then to highlight her top three choices on the remaining list of 11 universities. Beth then tells the student that she should prioritize those three applications.

By providing students with such straightforward feedback on this process, the University Preparation Program advisors were able to manage student expectations and help them create realistic goals that were aligned with their individual situations.

Additionally, some participants also reflected on the advising sessions in this way during my interviews. Abdul, a Saudi student who was applying to graduate programs in Law, reflected on the advising support he received in the following excerpt:

> All of the advising I got from the University Preparation consulting was really helpful because sometimes when I write something and look at it, I'll say "OK, it's perfect." But someone who is an expert in this particular thing looks at my statement and says, "Ok this is too general, you aren't being specific about why you want to go to this school; try to make connections." This information might be little, but it's so helpful and if my personal statement has all these parts of information, it would have more chances to be one of the winner applications.

This student viewed the University Preparation Program advisors as experts and therefore, was willing to be responsive to the feedback they offered, even when it was critical and presented in a direct manner. Amanda, the IEP Manager at Fisher, also emphasized the direct nature of the feedback students received in the one-on-one advising sessions when describing the aspects of the University Preparation Program that are most helpful to students:

> The one-on-on advising I think is key, especially in writing the graduate applications statements and university essays at the undergraduate level, because they need that kind of direct feedback and when you can meet with someone 4-5 times to get that. I think it is really pivotal in making a better application for acceptance.

In this excerpt, Amanda has also pointed out the importance of both the direct feedback given to students in the advising sessions, as well as the value in receiving that type of feedback in a consistent and repeated environment.

My observations of one-on-one advising sessions frequently revealed the same type of direct feedback that administrators highlighted and that students had appreciated receiving. In one such advising session, Lauren was meeting with an 800-level Saudi

student who was applying to highly selective universities for his undergraduate degree. The student had created a new application essay and brought it to the session to receive feedback from Lauren. After taking the first 10 minutes of the advising session to read the essay and take notes, Lauren began to give the student direct feedback. The following excerpt from my field notes illuminates this blunt advisory approach:

> Lauren begins by pointing out what she likes about the essay—the structure, organization, rich detail. Lauren then says what she thinks she doesn't like—she tells the student that he is writing for a specific audience: the admissions committee. Lauren explains that the topic of his essay is too common, too much of a cliché and that writing what he thinks the admissions committee wants to hear is a bad strategy because it doesn't come across as authentic.
>
> Lauren goes on to tell him that she likes how he is building a story—thinks he is a good storyteller, but tells him that he may be telling the wrong story. The student nods in agreement while he is receiving this feedback, but then tries to justify what he was trying to do in the essay. However, Lauren strikes his explanation down, saying that she knows he can be more interesting; that he has better examples to use. Lauren puts it out there that it is his decision whether he wants to change his essay topic. She then asks him if he has any other ideas. The student describes his idea for talking about short films he makes and uploads to YouTube. Lauren excitedly remarks that this would be a much more interesting and uniquely personal topic.

This direct, yet personal approach was witnessed in all of my observations of advising sessions. The University Preparation advisors were not shy in the feedback they gave students; they told the students what they thought was good and what they thought needed to be improved in students' statements, essays, and résumés. This direct approach was also true in the feedback advisors gave to students on their university selection and choice: When the advisor thought the university was not a good fit for the student, they explicitly said so. By taking this stance in their interactions with students, the three University Preparation Program advisors that I observed came across as experts

possessing great authority on the applications and admissions process. It is important to note that the type of individualized attention, interpersonal relationship development, and management of student expectations with direct feedback that students experienced in one-on-one advising sessions were not reported to be occurring with their other IEP instructors; a finding that will be explored extensively in its own section later in this chapter.

University Preparation Program Courses

The second program resource to examine are the courses that are offered to University Preparation students as part of their program of study while enrolled in the IEP at Fisher University. All IEP students are eligible to take these University Preparation courses once they are enrolled at the program level required of each course. These courses fall into two distinct categories: (a) applications support and academic skills courses taught by IEP personnel and (b) test preparation classes offered by outside instructors. The first category of courses, those taught by IEP instructors, includes application essay/statement writing courses, TOEFL iBT and IELTS test preparation courses, and a Study Skills and Strategies course. Because the Study Skills and Strategies course focuses on academic preparation for students who will be transitioning to matriculated study and does not directly relate to applications and admissions support, this course will be described at length in Chapter 6 and will thus, not be elaborated on here. In terms of application writing support, the program offers three unique writing courses: (a) a course tailored to the undergraduate application essay, (b) a course that focuses on the graduate application statement, and (c) a third course that provides either undergraduate or graduate students additional support on their essays or statements in a

workshop format. The University Preparation Program also offers a total of four different courses focused on the preparation for standardized tests of English language proficiency: (a) a 500/600-level IELTS preparation course offered in the evening program, (b) a 500/600-level TOEFL iBT preparation course offered in the evening program, (c) a 700/800-level elective focused on the reading and writing sections of the TOEFL iBT, and (d) a 700/800-level elective focused on the speaking and listening sections of the TOEFL iBT. In addition to the applications support and academic preparation courses outlined above, the University Preparation Program also offers its students the opportunity to take courses that will prepare them for the SAT, SAT subject tests, ACT, GRE, or GMAT. Since these test preparation courses are taught by instructors who are employed as outside contractors, enrollment in these courses incurs a higher cost than the general IEP/ University Preparation Program tuition. It is important to make a distinction between these two types of test preparation courses because the IEP offered test preparation courses for language assessments (i.e., TOEFL iBT and IELTS) that were described above *are* taught by IEP instructors as part of the normal IEP curriculum and thus, do *not* require any additional cost.

After the advising sessions, the next program feature that the student participants discussed most frequently in positive terms were the University Preparation Program courses. After conducting the student interviews, I was surprised to discover that all 17 of the student participants had elected to take at least one University Preparation Program course and that most student participants had taken several of the courses offered by the program. As the student participants that I recruited for this study were academically bound, it may not initially seem consequential that all of the student participants had

enrolled in these University Preparation Program courses. However, when the fact that students must independently elect to enroll in these courses is taken into consideration, it is actually quite remarkable that all 17 of the participants had made the conscious decision to do so. More specifically, 13 of the 17 student participants had taken one or more of the application essays/statements writing courses, 10 of the 17 had taken one or more of the TOEFL or IELTS test preparation courses, and eight of the 17 student participants had paid the additional cost to take one or more of the supplemental test preparation courses offered. Even Badir, the student with the lowest English proficiency level at the time of the interview, had elected to take a 500/600-level TOEFL preparation course in the evenings in addition to his full course load during the day. Likewise, Julio, the Colombian student who was the only student participant not to take advantage of the one-on-one advising sessions, had also taken this 500/600-level TOEFL preparation course for two subsequent sessions in the evenings.

Overall, participants across all three groups spoke positively about the support offered to students through the University Preparation courses. However, the findings revealed that the students and instructors viewed the impact of these courses quite differently. While the student participants focused on the immediate support that these courses provided them in completing their university applications and thus, helping them to achieve their academic goals, the administrator and instructor participants expressed some concern that students' attention to these courses, and the applications process in general, came at the expense of their English language study. This issue of students neglecting their general IEP courses to focus on their applications and admissions is an

important one that will be touched upon later in this chapter and discussed in great depth in Chapter 6.

Supporting Students' Admissions Goals

In my interviews with student participants, I directly asked them about their experiences with the University Preparation Program and the courses offered by the program. In addition, several student participants also discussed these University Preparation courses in response to a more general question that I asked near the start of each interview: How do you think the IEP can help/helped you to achieve your goals? Several students responded to this question by highlighting the University Preparation Program courses as the primary means to help them reach their academic goals. In this regard, student participants had made an explicit connection between the instruction they were receiving in these courses and their needs in the university applications process. Ingrid, a French student applying for undergraduate admissions, was one such student who focused on the role of these courses in helping her to achieve her goal of gaining undergraduate admittance to a highly selective university. Ingrid had applied to Fisher University to major in finance the previous year, when she was a high school senior in France, but she explained that she "got rejected because my scores weren't that great." In light of this rejection, Ingrid had decided to study at Fisher's IEP for a "gap year" in order to improve her test scores and to be a more competitive applicant. Ingrid discussed how the IEP could help her do so, by stating:

> With the SATs—I have done SATs and Math 2 with [a contracted test preparation instructor] and that helped me a lot because last year, Fisher was requiring it for the [Business] school. They don't [have that requirement] anymore, but I still think it's a good idea to take it. And I didn't have half the classes that are necessary to do the Math 2, so now I

> think I'm going to have a good score. This is the same thing for SAT reasoning—I'm improving every day. I am working also with Beth on my essays and it helped me also to take the Writing Essay for the University Application class because the essay I wrote last year was not what the universities are accepting. It was too formal and too concise. Now I really understood what they want.

This excerpt illustrates Ingrid's focus on the applications process and her appreciation of the SAT preparation courses and application essay writing course in supporting her though that process.

Another student participant who responded to my general question about how the IEP could help her achieve her academic goals by highlighting the University Preparation Program courses that she had taken was Aisha, a Saudi student applying to PhD programs. Aisha described the value she attributed to the University Preparation courses as follows:

> By the courses, the classes they offer like the test preparation for the GRE and the graduate writing statement, which I am taking now. So it's kind of like—It's classes, but also the class makes me achieve the thing that I really need, so I am not wasting time. It's really a good thing.

Just as Ingrid had, Aisha valued the University Preparation Program courses over the other aspects of Fisher's IEP because these courses were directly providing her support with her applications: "The thing that I really need." Further, it is quite telling that Aisha mentioned that she was "not wasting time" in these courses. By making this observation, Aisha is indirectly presenting a contrasting viewpoint that was also discussed by a number of other student participants: The notion that their English language courses at the IEP *were* a waste of these students' time. The fact that many student participants attributed greater worth to the University Preparation Program courses, and the other University Preparation Program resources for that matter, than they did to their academic

English courses offered by the IEP is an important finding that will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Application Support at the Expense of Language Instruction

Administrator and instructor participants also discussed the benefits of the University Preparation Program courses in providing necessary support to students as they undertake the applications and admissions process. However, instructors and administrators were a bit torn in their sentiments about the role these classes played in conjunction with the general English language courses offered by Fisher's IEP. Lauren had actually designed the curriculum for the application writing courses and the study skills and strategies course in her role as the University Preparation Program advising specialist. Despite being a strong advocate for these courses and the support they provided to academically bound students, Lauren expressed concerns that these courses may be overtaking students' schedules at the expense of their English language instruction:

> I think when students are taking classes—[when they] take classes that aren't a good match for their needs at the moment, that isn't helping prepare them. I think another issue might be that taking too many University Preparation courses, like the students [taking test prep courses offered by the contracted instructors], and they are taking a test prep course and then they are taking an Application Essay course or a TOEFL course and say they are in 700—that is taking the place of Academic English electives. So if they do that for 7 sessions that may be preparing for their application process, but not for their program as well.

A very similar sentiment arose in my interview with Linda. As the University Preparation Program manager, Linda had, perhaps, the most to gain from portraying the program in positive terms. Nevertheless, Linda also expressed concerns about how

students' enrollment in too many University Preparation Program courses could negatively impact their language acquisition:

> There is only so much time in a student's day and when they are at lower levels, they really need to be working on their English. At 600, they can start taking SAT prep and university application essays classes, and all of that, while it is valuable and they really need it, it pulls them out of English classes. . . . I just think we need to be careful about making sure that students have that room in their schedule to really be working on their English.

Thus, although the University Preparation Program courses were perceived to be beneficial by members of all three participant groups, the administrator and instructor participants were more conflicted about the cost that these courses incurred on the development of students' overall linguistic and academic readiness.

Credit Course Option

The third University Preparation Program feature to be discussed is the credit course option. This program resource allows eligible students (i.e., those who have successfully passed one session at the 800 level) the opportunity to take an undergraduate credit course while still enrolled in the Fisher's IEP. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ability to enroll in a credit course was found to be extremely useful by the students who were able to take advantage of that program option. However, as only four students, less than 25% of the student participants, had been able to enroll in the credit course option by the time of their interviews, few student participants were able to highlight this program feature. Moreover, an even smaller percentage of the overall IEP population is able to take advantage of this program feature for the host of reasons detailed in Chapter 4. Consequently, although the credit course option was a highly

valuable program feature to the few students who were able to enroll in these courses, the limited reach of this resource restricted its efficacy for the general student population. Because this program resource has been described at length in Chapter 4 in the discussion of IEP students' academic socialization and their participation in the larger university community of practice, I will move directly to the discussion of the open information sessions offered by the University Preparation Program.

Open Information Sessions

The fourth and final program feature offered by the University Preparation Program to be discussed are the open information sessions. The University Preparation Program offers a variety of information sessions that are open to all IEP students, regardless of the IEP level in which they are enrolled. These information sessions include regular applications and admissions workshops, as well as occasional college fairs and admissions events hosted by the University Preparation Program. During all six IEP sessions offered each year, members of the University Preparation Program offer several workshops on various topics, including: (a) the features of the University Preparation Program, (b) the basics of admissions (separate sessions for undergraduate and graduate students), (c) writing application essays and statements (separate sessions for undergraduate and graduate students), (d) résumé development for graduate students, and (e) an overview of the common application for undergraduate students. The University Preparation Program also hosts a yearly college fair for international students attending the IEP at Fisher University, while also inviting students from all other local IEPs. At this college fair, representatives from universities in the region provide information for admissions to both undergraduate and graduate programs at their

respective institutions. Additionally, the University Preparation Program occasionally hosts admissions officers from outside universities who conduct live or virtual information sessions with IEP students. Perhaps even more importantly, the University Preparation Program publicizes all other admissions events that are occurring in the region that are open to the public through outreach on the Learning Management System site to which all IEP students are enrolled and through email announcements.

In contrast to the three University Preparation Program features already discussed in this chapter, most student participants did not regard the open information sessions offered by the University Preparation Program to be a very useful source of support during the applications and admissions process. Although many of the student participants had attended some of these workshops or events, rarely did they describe these open information sessions as being helpful. For example, Ingrid, a French student applying for undergraduate admissions, described her experience with the University Preparation workshops she attended as follows:

> I went to a University Preparation workshop at the beginning. It was about essays and the application process. It was really interesting, but it didn't help me because I did the application process already and the [one about the] essays—I was [already] taking the essay writing class.

Ingrid was not alone in her opinion about these workshops. Other students expressed similar reactions to their experiences with these open information sessions. When I had asked Badir, the Omani student who had been the only student participant to express a negative perception of the University Preparation Program, whether he found the workshops he attended to be helpful, he replied, "No, not really because I know this information before I came here." In fact, only one student participant highlighted these

workshops as being a particularly helpful feature of the University Preparation Program. Saad, a Saudi student who was applying to Master's programs in finance, had attended a résumé workshop and a workshop on the basics of graduate admissions, which he described as "very helpful—I thought some information and then I attended the workshop[s], [and] I saw many new information that helped me improve some."

The finding that only one of the student participants identified this University Preparation Program feature to be particularly helpful was surprising, as these student opinions were in stark contrast to the positive views of administrator and instructor participants concerning the same program resources. The administrator participants, in particular, stressed the value and importance of these open information sessions in the overall structure of the University Preparation Program. Amanda, the IEP manager, succinctly described the function of these workshops when she stated, "I think our workshops on Fridays are really helpful in getting students the information to the questions they have, kind of like an FAQ." The University Preparation Program staff likewise viewed these workshops as a "quick hitting" means of conveying necessary information to large groups of students at one time. Beth, the full-time instructor devoted to the University Preparation Program, expressed her frustration by the fact that students sometimes came to her advising sessions to discuss the application process in general by explaining that "we encourage the students to go the workshops because that is where all of that information is given." Lauren reiterated the University Preparation Program's stance on the function of the workshops, in contrast to that of the advising sessions:

> We like to encourage students to come to workshops to get the basic information and then get started on their work and come to us [in advising

> sessions] as needed for review. Some don't come to a workshop and then come to advising and we have to give them all the information.

These divergent perspectives indicate that there was a mismatch in the intended function that the University Preparation Program administrators believed these open information sessions should serve and students' use and appreciation of these sessions. Instead of perceiving these sessions as an efficient means of receiving college choice information, student participants found the information sessions to be perhaps too generic and scripted to be personally relevant to their individualized needs. Recall how Alhusain, a formerly enrolled Turkish student who had matriculated into a master's program in engineering, had compared the value he found in the few workshops that he had attended to that he ascribed to his experience with advising sessions:

> I didn't feel they were really beneficial honestly because I visited her [Beth], I could have it directed to whatever I want. One-on-one advising was a lot more helpful because after a few times of visiting, she knew me so she knows my needs which is great to have some quick information.

The data thus indicate that the student participants did not seem to value the one-off nature of these sessions and instead, preferred to obtain the information presented in these sessions through the alternative means of one-on-one advising sessions or their University Preparation courses.

Instructors' Roles of Informal Applications and Admissions Support

In addition to the formal support offered to academically bound students engaged in the applications and admissions process, I also investigated the informal support that instructors of the general IEP courses at Fisher University provided to their students throughout this process. During their studies at an IEP, students are likely to have more direct contact with their instructors on a daily basis than they do with any other

administrative staff. These are *Intensive* English Programs, after all, and thus, students spend between 20-25 hours per week in the classroom. As such, instructors often function as the primary point of contact for these students. Throughout my analysis of interview and observational data, two prominent themes arose concerning the roles the instructors at this IEP did and did not assume in their support of the academically bound students enrolled in their courses. These themes included: (a) The peripheral role that instructors played in supporting students throughout the application and admissions process, and (b) instructors' lack of institutional knowledge of the University Preparation Program resources. These themes will be discussed in turn below in order to better understand the ways in which the instructors at this IEP were providing assistance to their students throughout the applications and admissions process.

Peripherality in Student Support

When I embarked upon the data collection for this study, I anticipated that I would discover that the IEP instructors played a prominent role in supporting their students throughout the applications and admissions process. After all, 77% of the students enrolled in Fisher's IEP at the time of data collection stated that they planned to attend either an undergraduate (41%) or a graduate (36%) degree program at an American university (Intensive English Program survey, 2015). However, I was astonished to discover that the five instructors I had interviewed for this study all reported that they provided very little, if any, applications or admissions support to their students. Likewise, the finding that instructors were serving as a source of informal applications and admissions support for students did not emerge from the student or administrator

interview data nor did I witness any explicit college choice support occurring in my observations of the general IEP courses.

In each interview, I asked instructor participants a version of the following question: "What do you do to assist students with their applications and admissions process?" The instructors' responses demonstrated a slight range of involvement; however, none reported being more than peripherally engaged in the process. Agata, an experienced instructor who had taught at the IEP for seven years, responded to my question of whether there is anything she does in her instruction or outside of class to help her students with their applications with a blunt "no." When I followed up by asking whether students asked her about the resources available through the University Preparation Program, Agata replied:

> They don't ask me. If they do, they ask me specific questions that I know I am not an expert in and wouldn't be able to help them. So I refer them to them [to the University Preparation Program staff] if there's a situation like that.

This response indicates that Agata saw the applications and admissions process to be completely separate from the linguistic and academic development that she was facilitating in her IEP course instruction. Accordingly, she had made the conscious decision to leave such support to the University Preparation Program "experts."

Other instructors were not as direct in reporting their limited involvement in supporting their students through the applications and admissions process. Sandra and Emily both referred to small tricks and tips that they occasionally tried to incorporate into their instruction that students could employ when writing their application essays and personal statements. Emily described one such instance in the following excerpt:

> This is a one-off—this isn't a general thing I do—but I remember I was teaching 700 and we did descriptive writing with figurative language and I remember saying, 'If we do this essay and do it well, it would be a really good admissions essay because it's descriptive, it says something about you and your outlook on life and it's using all of this language.' So sometimes things like this—I will try to relate and sometimes that results in a little bit of motivation or interest in that particular assignment.

Sandra similarly reported that she would relate certain language features, such as the use of nouns as nominal pre-modifiers (e.g., The red-haired, blue-jean wearing boy is my nephew), that she was covering in her class instruction to how students' could use those features to improve their application essays. Even though she had chosen to provide this strategy as her example for how she supported students with the applications and admissions process, she was a bit conflicted over her use of this approach and stated, "so even though I don't believe writing should be a bunch of gimmicky writing tricks but, nonetheless, I will use it to sell advanced grammar and use it in their application essay."

Several of the instructor participants also discussed a few instances in which students had asked them to write letters of recommendation for their applications. However, these requests seemed to be few and far between. Sandra explained her approach to writing recommendation letters for her students:

> When I write letters of recommendation, if they ask me, I'll tell them that I don't lie. So I won't say they're the best English student I've had, but I may write they are hardworking and attentive and ask good questions and are still struggling as language learners. I will say that. They either back off or go away—I haven't had many requests lately.

Sandra was not the only instructor participant who had remarked that they had not received many recommendation requests lately. Several other instructors also stated that the frequency of requests for recommendations had diminished in recent years; perhaps in response to the expansion of the University Preparation Program. In recent years, the

University Preparation Program Advisors have taken on the role of educating students about the importance of acquiring recommendation letters from sources who will be most beneficial to their applications (e.g., instructors from students' high schools or undergraduate degrees in the field they wish to study who have known them for a substantial amount of time and can comment on their academic ability and individual character). Isaac, who had been teaching at Fisher's IEP for four years, described how students' solicitation of his applications support had decreased in the short time since he had begun teaching at Fisher University:

> In class, it's hard to see anything that is geared towards that [applications or admissions support] and it has been awhile since students have come to me. It used to be, during a certain time of year, where I would have several students come to me asking for help with their applications, statements of purpose, and essays. But that would be outside of class, not part of instruction or any assignment.

Issac's narrative in which he described how students had previously come to him for help with elements of their applications outside of class was an experience that was echoed by Jamie, who described similar out-of-class encounters with students:

> Jamie: Off the grid, students will ask me to look at their applications for grammatical purposes. It is outside of class. I mean sometimes it is as simple as having a conversation. I had one student who was really sad and I asked him, why? And he just wasn't getting the TOEFL score he needed to get into Penn, Harvard, and these other schools. And it was really just having a simple conversation saying "well, most American students have reach schools and they also have attainable schools and safety schools and so being realistic is something that American students have to come to terms with where they can realistically be accepted to. This may be where we need to expand your search and not just consider the top schools." That wasn't done in class, but outside of class support.

Sarah: Was that conversation effective? When you have those conversations with students, do they get it?

Jamie: I do. When I talked to him, he said he's going to look at some schools and he is going to sign up for an IELTS test. So I am trying to get him to see out of this box he created. His mother went to Georgetown and his father went to George Washington so I think his idea is I don't have a choice, but sometimes we have to have a choice. So that is where that I went. I think that was useful but outside of class.

In this description of her "off the grid" support of students, Jamie was found to be the instructor participant who was most actively engaged in supporting her students with the applications and admissions process. Even still, Jamie made the point of reiterating that this support was provided outside of class; as she seemed to imply that this type of support did not have a place in the IEP classroom.

In summary, these IEP instructors viewed themselves as having either no role or an extremely limited role in supporting their students through the college choice process. Those instructors who did assume a role in this support limited it to providing quick tips in their instruction, having very occasional discussions with students outside of class about their admissions decisions, or attending to the even less frequent request for a recommendation. This may have been a result of the fact that instructors regarded the active applications or admissions support that their students required to be outside of their purview. In contrast to serving a marginal role in students' college choice support, these instructors certainly viewed themselves as playing an active role in facilitating their students' academic preparation, a finding that will be discussed at length in the next chapter. This finding indicates a discrepancy between instructor and student priorities:

While instructors viewed their role as one of linguistic and academic readiness support, students were focused on the more immediate needs of the college choice process.

Lack of Institutional Knowledge

When attempting to understand why IEP instructors played only a peripheral role in supporting their students through the applications and admissions process, instructors' lack of institutional knowledge about the University Preparation Program surfaced as a factor and potentially, a cause of this peripherality. In my interviews, I asked each instructor whether they were familiar with the University Preparation Program resources. Because all of the instructors had been teaching at Fisher's IEP for a considerable length of time and the University Preparation Program had frequently provided information to instructors on the resources offered by the program, I had anticipated that all of the instructors interviewed would have felt confident in their knowledge of the program. Once again, the findings disproved my assumptions. Despite receiving information about the University Preparation Program in numerous IEP meetings and professional development sessions, as well as in frequent email communications, most of the instructor participants recounted a surprisingly limited familiarity with the program resources. Agata, a well-respected adjunct lecturer who had been teaching at Fisher's IEP for seven years, described her familiarity with the University Preparation Program resources as follows:

> I would say minimally. I know who is responsible for what and I vaguely know what they are working on through their mini-presentations or when they come to the meetings. So I kind of know who to send students to or how to respond to some questions, but I don't know a whole lot.

Although Agata recalled learning about these resources in meetings and "mini-presentations," the information she received did not provide her with the confidence to feel fully knowledgeable about the resources offered by the University Preparation Program.

Other instructors expressed similar ambivalence about their knowledge of the University Preparation Program: Emily responded with "I think so," Jamie answered by stating "I believe so," and Isaac replied that he was familiar with "some" of the resources offered by the program. The only instructor who answered the question with some level of certainty was Sandra. As the only instructor participant who had taught a University Preparation Program class, Sandra had more direct experience with the program and drew upon on that experience in her response:

> I know the University applications essay class and I know the advising we offer and I am a big fan of that whole team of advisers up there. I'm always like, "Did you talk to Evan yet? Lauren?" I'm a big promoter of those. And the college fair. I'm not sure if there are any other classes I should be pointing them too.

Despite possessing the greatest level of familiarity with the University Preparation Program, Sandra still was not completely confident in her knowledge of all of the available program resources.

As a result of this lack of institutional knowledge, these instructors were not able to provide their students with adequate information about the applications and admissions support that was available to them through the University Preparation Program. When asked if he ever refers his students to the University Preparation Program resources, Isaac, a full-time instructor who had been working at the IEP for 4 years at the time of the interview, replied:

> I think maybe once ever, like, for instance. Separate from that, if there is an email saying recommend your students to come to this thing, then I will pass it on to the students. But spontaneously or relevant to coursework, almost never.

Jamie, the IEP instructor who had commented about the growth of the University Preparation Program in an earlier section of this chapter, depicted a similar experience in response to this question about referring students to the University Preparation Program resources:

> I used to, there used to be a lot of questions about that but since the University Preparation Program has grown. I mean it used to be just Evan and Linda or Evan and [a former advisor]. I used to get a lot more questions but I think it has just grown. It's so advertised and so students do know about the resources now that I don't need to refer them.

Although Jamie's observation of the increased "advertising" of the University Preparation Program is once again accurate, her perception that she is no longer needed to refer students to the program resources is not aligned with the stance of the University Preparation Program administrators. In recent years, the University Preparation Program has focused a great deal of energy on student outreach and ensuring that more students are informed about the resources they offer. Nevertheless, there are still students at Fisher's IEP who fall through the cracks and do not learn about these resources. Sandra described such students in her response to my question about directing her students to the University Preparation Program resources:

> It's almost a Catch 22—if they don't know about them, they don't ask. Because I've had students who for some reason didn't know about them—I'd be like you wrote your essay and talked to Evan and they'll be like, "Who?" And I'll be like, how can that be? So, it has happened. It's not so common though, but there are some solo people out there figuring it out on their own. We have great resources here. We have better resources than my daughter's high school of how many thousands of students,

> because of school funding they don't have any of the resources we have here.

Because it is the instructors who have the most direct contact with students on a daily basis, it is lost opportunity if instructors are not acting as ambassadors for the University Preparation Program by informing their students of the resources they have available to them through the program.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings related to the second research question in this dissertation study: What supports do IEPs provide students during the applications and admissions process and how closely aligned is this support with students' needs and expectations? Participants' perceptions of the formal applications and admissions support structure offered by the University Preparation Program revealed some differences among the participant groups: Student participants most valued the support they received in the one-on-one advising sessions and, to a slightly lesser degree, the University Preparation Program courses, while administrator and some instructor participants placed greater value on the open information sessions offered by the program. The findings revealed that all student participants took advantage of at least one aspect of the University Preparation Program and the student participants reported that this formal support structure was largely meeting their college choice needs. In contrast, the data illuminated an incongruity between instructor and student expectations: Instructors did not take an active role in supporting their students with the college choice process because they viewed this to be outside of their role in facilitating students'

linguistic development and academic readiness, while students' primary focus was on the immediate needs associated with the applications and admissions process.

CHAPTER 6

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

By investigating the academic preparation that occurs within the context of an IEP, this chapter examines the third research question in this study: How well do IEPs prepare international students for their transition into matriculated undergraduate and graduate degree programs? I endeavored to address this substantial question through an investigation of participants' perceptions of students' academic and linguistic needs, as well as their beliefs of how the IEP courses were meeting those needs in order to support students' achievement of their goals of successfully transitioning to matriculated study. The findings from this dissertation reveal that across the participant groups there existed a fundamental difference in the conceptualization of student needs and the function of the IEP: Students were focused on their immediate needs associated with the college choice process in order to achieve the short-term goal of gaining university admission, while instructors concentrated on facilitating students' linguistic and academic readiness so that students could achieve the long-term goal of successful degree completion. Despite this fundamental disparity in perceptions, the findings identified several courses that were frequently reported to be useful in preparing students for their academic studies and revealed some common elements of such effective courses. Further, the findings suggest that former students generally felt prepared when they transitioned to their undergraduate or graduate degree programs after studying at Fisher's IEP. These former students reflected on their IEP preparation in terms of concrete academic skill development, as well as the role the IEP played in their academic socialization and familiarization with

American academic conventions. An exploration of how these findings manifested themselves in the data are presented in this chapter according to the following themes: (a) conceptualizations of student needs and the function of the IEP, (b) IEP course efficacy in academic preparation, and (c) former student readiness for transition to matriculated study.

Conceptualizations of Student Needs and IEP Function

When investigating how well this IEP was preparing its students for their subsequent university study, it was important to first understand the needs of these students and how the IEP functioned in meeting those needs. When I began this study, I had thought that perceptions of student needs would be rather straightforward and consistent across participant groups. After all, these students had elected to apply to and enroll in an English language program, so I had assumed that students' linguistic needs would be at the front and center of all participants' priorities. However, the findings were anything but straightforward and instead, revealed a discrepancy in participants' understandings of the needs students had in achieving their academic goals. The instructor participants focused primarily on developing students' language proficiency and academic readiness. On the other hand, the student participants were most concerned with improving their test scores and application materials, rarely mentioning their language needs. Interestingly, most of the administrator participants presented a more balanced understanding of student needs by focusing on both students' academic language development and their short-term needs associated with the college choice process. These varied conceptualizations of student needs and the function of the IEP in meeting those needs are discussed in turn in the following subsections.

Students' Short-Term Focus

Throughout the analysis of student interview data, I was surprised by how few student participants expressed concern about their English language ability or placed their English language development at the forefront of the discussion of their needs while studying at the IEP. Although student participants did comment on the improvement they had made in their English language development and the role that the IEP played in supporting that progress, these students rarely identified this linguistic development as their primary need in the pursuit of their academic goals. Instead, student participants' focused on the more immediate needs associated with the college choice process, which seemed to overshadow the attention they were willing to pay to their academic language development.

Students' conceptualization of their needs and the function of the IEP surfaced early in each interview when I asked every student participant why they had decided to come to Fisher's IEP to study English. Because I was well aware that all of these students were academically bound, I was not taken aback when almost every student that I interviewed mentioned their academic goal of gaining admission to an undergraduate or graduate degree program in response to this question. However, the way in which these students positioned their English language needs in relation to the achievement of their academic goals was quite interesting. Most of the student participants did not express a general desire to improve their English language proficiency so that they would be able to better perform in their academic courses and ultimately succeed in their degree programs. Instead, these students largely presented a shortsighted understanding of their English language needs that did not extend beyond the attainment of the university acceptance

letter. Abdul, a Saudi student who was applying to graduate programs in Law, exhibited such a limited conceptualization of his needs when he stated the following reason for studying at Fisher's IEP: "In order to improve my English and achieve 100 in TOEFL to be admitted into law school in the United States—get my master's degree and then doctorate." Students' attention to the application process and in particular, their test scores, is not surprising as the large majority of U.S. universities rely on these standardized test scores (i.e. TOEFL iBT, IELTS) as the primary means of evaluating applicants' linguistic readiness for university study (Andrade et al., 2014). For Abdul and other such students, the idea of "improving their English" was understood solely as the practical manifestation of an increase in admissions test scores and the ability to submit a more successful application.

The analysis of student interview data confirmed that the completion of a successful application, and all of the components required of that application (e.g., TOEFL score, application essay, etc.), was the endpoint in itself for many of these students. This theme further manifested itself in students' responses to my questions about their short-term and long-term goals, as well how the IEP could help them to achieve those goals. One student participant whose narrative clearly illustrated this theme was Saad, a Saudi student who was applying to master's programs in finance. Saad had come to the IEP on a scholarship from the Saudi university where he worked as a teaching assistant with the explicit directive of completing a master's degree and subsequently, a PhD in the United States. When explaining how he thought the IEP could help him to achieve these lofty goals, Saad stated:

> The main reason is to improve my English. The English is my barrier to achieve my goals. So if I can pass the English language requirement and prove my language to be qualified to study at United States university. I also prepare for my GMAT tests and there are some TOEFL courses I am planning to take. Besides, writing the statement of purposes.

By conceptualizing his language needs in this manner, Saad viewed his English language proficiency as an impediment to achieving his goal of gaining graduate admission. Therefore, the primary need that the IEP was serving was quite functional in nature for this student: The IEP would help Saad to overcome the "English language requirement" of achieving a certain TOEFL iBT test score, which he viewed as preventing him from gaining admission to the universities to which he was applying.

Other students reiterated this perspective in their discussion of the function of the IEP in helping them to meet their goals. Badir, an Omani student planning to apply to undergraduate programs, described how the IEP could help him to achieve his goals as follows, "By improving my English and giving me strategies on how to do these conditions, how I can get high score in TOEFL and how I can apply for this university." Students' concern with meeting these standardized test score requirements has been reiterated throughout the literature (Abel, 2002; Andrade, 2006; Andrade et al., 2014; Lee & Wesche, 2000) and remained a dominant theme among the student participants at Fisher. Similarly, Dastan, a former IEP student from Kazakhstan who had just completed a master's in Law degree, reflected upon the role that Fisher's IEP played in his academic pursuits by stating, "My goal was to improve my English to get accepted from a U.S. university for a master's degree and finally, finish my master's degree." Once again, these students conceptualized their needs in the concrete terms of the completion of a successful application. They had not come to Fisher's IEP simply to develop their

English language proficiency. Instead, they viewed English as a tool that would help them gain admission to the degree program of their choice by increasing their test scores and assisting them in the development of more effective application essays or statements.

Most of the student participants interviewed for this dissertation were almost single-minded in their focus on achieving the short-term academic goal of gaining university admission. Accordingly, these students concentrated their attention on the tangible needs they saw on the applications they were completing and listed in the university admissions requirements. Because the University Preparation Program offered students direct support on the application process, these program resources were highlighted by several students when explaining their reason for studying at Fisher's IEP. Aisha, a Saudi student applying for admission to a PhD program, detailed her reason for deciding to study at Fisher's IEP: "I read through the website and found out there is University Preparation Program, which is preparation and I need the GRE and I decided the IEP would be better than any institution that I have seen." In this regard, the majority of student participants prioritized the application process itself over the linguistic and academic skills they would need once they managed to matriculate into their degree program.

In fact, only one student participant, Khulood, expressed a more holistic understanding of the role her English language development played in helping her to achieve her long-term goals. When I asked Khulood, a highly engaged Omani student who was applying to undergraduate programs, why she had decided to come to Fisher's IEP to study English, she provided the following response:

Khulood: Because I wanted to improve my academic English, the type of English that I'm going to have to use in university. It will make my transition to university easier.

Sarah: How do you think the IEP—you said you wanted to improve your academic English for the transition to university next year—so how can the IEP help you to do that?

Khulood: Well, first, because I have to continually be practicing my English. I have to be in situations where I am going to be in contact with native English speakers and I am getting to be surrounded by the American culture.

Khulood's perception of her English language needs exemplified the type of response I had anticipated receiving from most student participants. On the contrary, I found it remarkable that so few student participants expressed a comprehensive understanding of the role that English language proficiency would play in their ability to succeed in their matriculated degree programs.

Furthermore, many student participants explicitly stated that they believed their English proficiency would not cause them difficulty once they entered their degree programs. Jiao, a Chinese student applying for admission to master's programs in design, articulated an interesting contradiction in her understanding of the role her English proficiency would play in her ability to complete a master's degree in the United States. Early in our interview, Jiao described her English proficiency as follows: "I'm still not very good at English, even after coming to studying it here." Yet, when I asked Jiao how well prepared she believed she was to succeed in a master's program, Jiao went on to say, "So I think for English—before I start my university I will go to another credit class—and my English won't have a problem. I can understand lectures." As the only student participant to have taken two credit courses while enrolled at Fisher's IEP, Jiao had more

direct experience with mainstream American university courses than any other current student participant. Nevertheless, the credit courses that Jiao had taken were at the undergraduate level. I was thus surprised that her performance in those courses would provide Jiao with such great confidence in her ability to subsequently succeed in a challenging master's degree program. Other student participants likewise expressed a surprising degree of confidence in their English language proficiency and their ability to undertake undergraduate or graduate level courses in English. When I asked Julio, a Colombian student who was only at the 600 level at the time of the interview, whether he thought his English language would be sufficient for him to succeed in an MBA program, he provided the following response: "Yes, I think so because I see my progress. When I came here in March to today, I see I can speak very good."

The student participants I interviewed for this study rarely identified the development of their English language proficiency as their primary need in the pursuit of their academic goals. The reason these students were not particularly concerned with their English language needs appeared to be twofold: First, student participants were primarily concerned with their short-term goal of gaining admission to a degree program and consequently, were almost exclusively focused on the immediate needs associated with the completion of a successful application. These students seemed to equate linguistic readiness with their ability to obtain a certain score on the TOEFL or IELTS. Accordingly, participants deemed their English proficiency to be sufficient once they were able to achieve those standardized test score requirements. This illustrates the washback effect of these high-stakes standardized language tests on students' perceptions of language proficiency (Green, 2007; Fox et. al, 2014; Wagner, 2014). Second, most of

the student participants portrayed a sense of confidence in their English language proficiency, even in cases where their linguistic abilities did not warrant such a conviction, and believed that their English abilities would be sufficient for their subsequent degree studies. Because of this short-term focus and confidence in their language abilities, these students could not see the bigger picture of the role that their English language proficiency would play in their ultimate academic success. As a result, the data revealed that some of these students neglected their English language courses. Rana, a former student participant who was enrolled in an undergraduate program at Fisher University, astutely reflected on this issue:

> We were really good students, we thought we had it all covered and we don't really need to pay attention and the courses in the second semester were just to fill our time, so we neglected them a lot. So I do regret neglecting those but it was more of my fault for not paying attention or not realizing that this could really help.

It is indeed unfortunate that students such as Rana could not look beyond their immediate needs to see how their IEP courses would be applicable to their subsequent degree studies. Regrettably, student inattention to English language courses emerged as a considerable issue for this IEP.

Instructors' Long-Term Outlook

In stark contrast to the student participants' conceptualizations of their needs, the instructors I interviewed for this study expressed a long-term perspective when considering the needs of students enrolled at Fisher's IEP. When discussing the needs of their academically bound students, the instructor participants focused their attention primarily on students' linguistic needs, with a secondary focus on the need to improve students' academic readiness. As described in the previous chapter, the instructor

participants maintained a peripheral role in students' college choice process as they viewed applications and admissions support to be largely outside the bounds of their scope of influence. Due to their lack of involvement in the college choice process, these instructors did not place much emphasis on the short-term needs of these students and instead, viewed the students' long-term needs to be considerably more important. After all, what good is a college acceptance if students are going to fail out of their classes during the first semester? Agata, an instructor with seven years of teaching experience at Fisher's IEP, succinctly expressed this opinion: "I think their aspirations in regard to actually getting into the university are somewhat realistic. I have serious concerns sometimes regarding how they will do in those programs—so their long-term success."

When discussing the needs of their students, the instructor participants conceived their role as one of supporting the development of students' English proficiency in order to facilitate their students' academic readiness. More specifically, when asked how they prepare students for their subsequent academic studies, several of the instructor participants emphasized different reading and writing strategies that they employed in their classroom instruction. Jamie, an adjunct lecturer, identified writing as the greatest need for her academically bound students:

> Writing—I just try to help them understand writing is a process. Although I have due dates for writing, there's no end date so they are always invited to continue to work on their writing. And, in fact, students are asking me if they can give me extra writing, so that's one thing that I do. Just trying to listen to their needs and adjust the courses depending on what they are asking for.

Similarly, Sandra, a fulltime instructor, highlighted the extensive reading and writing instruction she incorporated into her courses in order to support the needs of her academically bound students:

> I do put a lot of emphasis on writing and reading. I actually am kind of a believer in extensive reading and long writing. I don't want to cut out accuracy but I say, "No, we are not doing any of this 200-word thing, we are doing 600 to start. And you can do that." So I kind of believe in making them go long distance on tasks. On reading, I'll say, "This is 10 pages but it is an easy reading" and so I kind of want them to go the distance. I try to do distance training. I'll say measure your stamina, endurance as far as doing a lengthy pace.

By focusing their instruction on these academic skills and strategies, these instructors were attempting to address the needs that they anticipated would be most pressing for their students once they transitioned to matriculated study. Another fulltime instructor, Emily, tried to be even more explicit in providing her students with the linguistic and academic skills she thought they would most need in their degree studies:

> I think really anything relating to what they are going to do—whether it's taking notes during a lecture, describing data, identifying main ideas from a passage. All of that is going to relate to what they are going to do in their next academic step and I try to say that to them as much as possible if it seems particularly frustrating.

By explaining the purpose behind this type of instruction, Emily was hoping to get more buy-in from her students by trying to convince them that the skills she was teaching them would be ones that they would later need in their matriculated courses.

With students so focused on their immediate needs associated with the college choice process, instructors frequently struggled to retain students' attention in their English language courses. Some instructor participants voiced their explicit frustration with this struggle, explaining that many Fisher IEP students placed greater value on the

applications and admissions support they received through the University Preparation Program at the expense of their English language instruction. Agata was the instructor participant who was most vocal about this frustration:

> My main issue with them is that they seem to focus so much on the application process that they completely disregard their classes and so it is a complete parallel for me that they would think it is not important to learn English anymore because they are doing their application. Right now, I have three students that approached me that they are not going to do anything and it is a vocabulary class because they are applying or already applied. So that attitude that "I don't need to continue to improve my skills" is just mind boggling. That they don't see they still have weaknesses and it's scary because some of them have actually really big gaps to the point that they have zero or next to zero on their vocabulary quizzes. And that wouldn't alarm them in any way that "I don't have this basic vocabulary in this field and I am going into a graduate program." That there is this complete disconnect. I just don't understand where this is coming from and why one's mind can operate this way. I understand there are time constraints and they are prioritizing their essay but it's not that, it's not that explanation that I get. It's just that "I don't need it anymore," that "I'm done."

Other instructors were also cognizant of this issue and expressed similar concerns about the cost students' focus on the college choice process had on their language studies. When I asked Jamie, an adjunct instructor, about the largest issues she encountered in supporting students through their preparation for university study, she stated the following:

> They are obsessed with their TOEFL scores; trying to get a high enough TOEFL score. I would say that is number one. Secondly, they are not willing to rewrite a lot of times in their writing. They don't see it as a process, they see it as a product.

Once again, this participant had aptly identified students' immediate needs—admissions test scores—as the center of their attention. Jamie's observation that is perhaps more interesting was that the students at this IEP viewed their writing as a product and not a

process. This notion of students taking a product over process approach can be applied more broadly to students' general attitude concerning their IEP studies and can help to explain the mismatch between student and instructor perspectives of student needs.

Although the instructor participants certainly recognized that students were immersed in the short-term goal of gaining college admission, this recognition of students' self-identified needs did not translate into any changes in their beliefs or instructional practices. Instead, these instructors made the conscious decision to "hold the line" and continue to direct their attention entirely to students' long-term needs, which they believed superseded the immediate needs associated with the college choice process.

Administrators' Attempt at a Balanced Perspective

As opposed to the constrained perceptions expressed by both the students and instructors, the administrator participants conveyed a more balanced perspective of the needs of academically bound students enrolled at Fisher's IEP. These administrators were able to recognize the duality of the function of this IEP in both supporting students' linguistic development and academic readiness, while at the same time providing students with the concrete resources necessary to gain admission to an undergraduate or graduate degree program. Even though the administrator participants expressed this more nuanced understanding of the IEP's function, they were nonetheless conflicted about the program's ability to effectively serve these dual roles. Evan, the University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist, brought up this issue in response to my question regarding the efficacy of the IEP courses in giving students the language and academic skills necessary for their subsequent study:

> I think the IEP is very helpful. I think the challenge comes in when the students don't know how to balance their IEP studies and their application process. I think the IEP gets devalued in their mind and they don't put in as much effort as they need to because they are so worried about their admission. Even though we tell them constantly, "Look we can help you edit your personal statement all you want, but if you don't have the English skills to express yourself, we can't really do anything about that. If we can't get your TOEFL score up, we can't really do anything about that."

Although administrator participants, such as Evan, expressed the belief that the IEP should attend to both short-term college choice needs and long-term academic language development needs, they likewise realized that it was hard for students to balance this dual focus.

The fact that students at Fisher's IEP "devalued" their English language courses because they were concentrating on the admission process was an issue that many of the administrator participants discussed during their interviews. Amanda, the IEP Manager, expressed her concerns about the challenges that the IEP faced as a result of students' focus on the application process and, in particular, test preparation, over their academic language development:

> I think the largest issue in our program that I find is that students are so focused on taking tests, like TOEFL or GRE, that they lose sight of the importance of actual language acquisition and learning in their other courses, which are actually going to facilitate higher scores for them. And I feel like that connection can get lost for a student when that situation is really stressful while they are preparing.

Although the University Preparation Program had the explicit mission to both help students navigate the college choice process *and* provide academic English preparation, these administrators seemed to believe that the program was falling short on the latter. Lauren, the University Preparation Program Advising Specialist, was cognizant of this

program deficit and described the method she employed in an attempt to address both aspects of the program mission:

> My role in assisting academically bound students is getting them to understand what they are entering into—clear up the illusions of both the application process and the program they are entering into—really getting them to understand how difficult it is, motivating them to get through the process and giving them some strategies and advice to prepare both for the application and evaluation process of their applications and also to do well in their classes now. Because some of them let their IEP classes go when they are working on their applications. So, I try to motivate them to see both—*you are not just applying, once you get there you have to actually be successful in the program* [added emphasis] and getting them to just think more in general about things because they seem to go through the process without a lot of thought. That is clear in their statements, so just getting them to think more about life in general. I think that is helpful to connect with a student and do this with them and they do better. And to inform them about everything they need to know and be there for them with appointments and get them through the process and advise them based on their strengths and weaknesses as they go.

Lauren was yet another participant to remark upon students' tendency to see the application process as an end in itself. By establishing interpersonal relationships with students in the context of one-on-one advising, Lauren tried to directly persuade students of the importance in attending to their English language development and academic preparation *in addition to* the application process.

Although the administrators were more understanding of students' dual needs than were the instructor participants, they still strongly believed that the IEP should function as a site of English language development and academic skill preparation. Linda, the University Preparation Program Manager, discussed the difficulty in getting students to shift their focus away from the immediate and tangible needs associated with the application process and to the academic preparation skills that would benefit them in the long-term:

> In theory, we provide advising on the preparation end but in practice most of our advising happens on the admissions end just because it is a more immediate and tangible need for students. I think students see the need for advising—if they are writing an application essay and they have a deadline and they need to submit it—they are going to make an advising appointment to get feedback on an essay because it is a very tangible need that they have. Students don't make appointments really to see an advisor for help with time management. It is not an immediate need with a deadline, even if it is something that they are struggling with.

Because students have limited attentional resources while studying at the IEP and gaining university admission is such a high-stakes need for these students, the administrators were sympathetic to the fact that students prioritized the immediate and tangible needs associated with the college choice process. Nonetheless, these administrators knew that many of these students needed to improve their linguistic and academic skills if they were to be successful in their future degree programs. Thus, the challenge the administrators at this IEP faced was in how they could attend to students' short-term needs, while simultaneously addressing the long-term needs associated with matriculated degree success.

IEP Course Efficacy in Academic Preparation

For most academically bound students at Fisher University's IEP, the applications and admissions process was their primary and central focus. Nevertheless, the majority of students at this IEP had very real linguistic and academic needs that extended beyond the narrow confines of the college choice process. In Chapter 5, I provided a detailed analysis of the University Preparation Program courses that were designed to provide students with applications support and standardized test preparation. In this section, I shift my attention to the IEP courses focused on developing students' English language proficiency and academic readiness as they prepared for future university study. In order

to gain a greater understanding of the efficacy of such IEP courses at Fisher University in preparing students for academic studies, I analyzed participants' experiences and perceptions, along with my observations of the English language and academic skills courses offered by this program. To begin this exploration of course efficacy, I present a quick overview of the IEP program structure and detail the types of courses offered to support students' academic preparation for their transitions to matriculated undergraduate or graduate degree programs.

The IEP at Fisher University is an intensive *English* program and as such, English language courses are the foundation of study at this program. As described previously, the courses in this program are structured into eight different proficiency levels; from the 100 level courses serving novice language learners to the 800-level courses for learners with high-intermediate to advanced English proficiency. Although students at any of the eight levels may be academically bound, the University Preparation Program track officially begins once students are enrolled in the 600 level or higher (i.e., CEFR B1+ and above). This is largely because students in levels 100-500 each take two core courses (i.e., reading and writing, listening and speaking) and thus, do not have the option of taking electives as part of their daily schedules at those levels. The only way that Fisher IEP students can take a University Preparation Program course prior to the 600 level is if they choose to take an IELTS or TOEFL preparation course in the evening in addition to their fulltime course load; these two evening test preparation courses are offered to students beginning at the 500 level. This level distinction in the University Preparation Program also exists because the administration at Fisher's IEP believe that students below the 600 level do not yet possess the language proficiency necessary to successfully

participate in the applications and admissions process. As this dissertation investigates the support, socialization, and preparation academically bound students received at this IEP while they were actively engaged in the applications and admissions process, I focused my examination on those English language courses at the 600 level or above that functioned and/or were explicitly designed as EAP courses. In the following pages, I describe participants' varied perspectives on the efficacy of these courses and then continue with an examination of the courses that were identified to be most useful in supporting students' academic preparation.

General Perceptions of Course Efficacy

When examining the perceived efficacy of the English language and academic readiness courses for academically bound students at Fisher's IEP, it is useful to first provide a brief overview of the EAP courses offered and the structure of the program. As defined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, EAP is the "specialized English-language teaching grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistic demands of academic target situations, providing focused instruction informed by an understanding of texts and the constraints of academic contexts" (Hyland, 2006, p. 2). In the context of this IEP, EAP instruction has been designed to give academically bound students the linguistic and cultural skills necessary to become successful participants in the academic classroom and American university community. In order to equip students with these skills, EAP courses aim to both develop students' English language proficiency and teach them academic skills and strategies (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015).

Because the large majority of students enrolled in the IEP at Fisher University are academically bound, most of the IEP's courses and particularly, the courses offered at the

600 level or higher, can be categorized as EAP courses. Students in the 600 and 700 levels take one integrated skills core course and their choice of two intermediate electives, while 800-level students take four advanced electives each session. The 600 and 700 integrated skills core courses must be taken by all students enrolled in those levels at the IEP and because the majority of IEP students have academic goals, the core courses at these levels were designed with academically oriented objectives. In addition, a large number of the intermediate and advanced electives are specifically tailored to EAP goals. The full range of EAP courses offered at the 600-800 levels in this IEP, along with the number of times each course was named by a participant as being a particularly useful course is displayed in Table 8. It is important to note that not all of these courses are offered with the same frequency nor is every course listed taught each session, as course availability is dependent upon student enrollments. Nevertheless, the findings presented in Table 8 reveal some important trends regarding participants' perceptions of course efficacy.

Table 8

EAP Courses Levels 600-800 & Course Efficacy Perspectives

Levels	Course	Students Identified Course as Useful	Instructors Identified Course as Useful	Administrators Identified Course as Useful	Total Times Identified as Useful
600/ 700	600 Core	0	0	1	1
	700 Core	3	1	2	6
	Intermediate Grammar	3	0	0	3
	Intermediate Reading & Discussion	0	0	1	1
	Listening to Lectures	3	1	4	8
	Reading for Academic Purposes	0	2	1	3
	Writing Accurately and Clearly	2	0	1	3
	Writing for Academic Purposes	1	1	1	3
700/ 800	Study Skills and Strategies	4	0	3	7
800	Advanced Grammar	0	0	1	1
	Advanced Reading for Academic Purposes	1	0	3	4
	Advanced Reading & Discussion	0	1	1	2
	Advanced Speaking & Listening for Academic Purposes	1	1	1	3
	Academic Vocabulary	2	0	1	3
	Advanced Writing for Academic Purposes	1	1	2	4
	English for Engineering	1	1	0	2
	English for Science	2	0	1	3
	Reading Academic Texts	0	1	0	1
	Research Paper Writing	1	0	2	3
	Reading, Writing & Speaking Critically about Science	0	0	0	0
	Writing: Style & Rhetoric	2	0	0	2
Totals		27	10	26	63

In order to better understand the data that are reported in Table 8, it is important to first clarify the questions that participants were asked to elicit these data. Table 9 lists the questions that I asked participants in each respective group in order to learn about the IEP courses that they perceived to be most effective in preparing students for subsequent academic studies.

Table 9

Interview Questions on Course Efficacy

Participant Group	Interview Question
Current Students	What courses have you found to be particularly useful in preparing for your studies?
Former Students	What courses do you think were particularly useful in preparing for your studies?
Instructors/ Administrators	What courses are particularly successful in preparing students for academic coursework?

By asking these questions in every interview, I was able to elicit a selection of courses that each participant identified as being particularly useful in helping to prepare themselves/students for subsequent academic studies. Participants were not given a list of courses offered to prompt their responses and instead, were simply asked to name courses based on their own recollections and experiences. The numbers listed in Table 8 indicate the number of participants in each respective group who identified a specific course as being particularly useful and/or successful. If we take the first course listed, 600 core, as an example, we can see that zero student participants, zero instructor participants, and one administrator participant (for a total of one participant) named the

course as being particularly useful in preparing students for their academic coursework. It is important to mention that Table 8 is not an inclusive list of all of the courses that participants cited in response to this question, as it only includes IEP courses designed to develop students' English language proficiency and academic readiness. Some participants also identified admissions and test preparation courses as being useful in preparing students for academic coursework; however, those courses are not directly related to students' academic preparation and were discussed at length separately in the previous chapter. As a result, the University Preparation Program courses that focus on admissions support and test preparation are not addressed here.

When analyzing the participants' perceptions of course efficacy, I was struck by several aspects of the findings. First, I was surprised that the participants named such a wide range of courses in response to my questioning and that there was not greater consensus in the courses identified. In fact, there were not any individual courses that were identified as being particularly useful by more than four participants in any individual participant group. I had anticipated that there would be some courses that would be almost unanimously cited by all participants or participants from a certain group as being most helpful in preparing students for their academic coursework, but this largely did not prove to be the case. No one course was cited by more than a total of eight participants, representing only 29.6% of the participants, across the three groups. The only instance in which a course was identified as useful by a large percentage of participants from a particular group was in the case of the Listening to Lectures course—four out of the five administrators named this course as being particular successful in assisting students' academic preparation.

There are several possible reasons to account for why there was not more agreement over the courses participants found to be most effective in supporting students' academic preparation. As stated previously, the courses listed in Table 8 are not all offered at the same frequency and thus, some courses have much more exposure than others. Although this may have had an impact on some infrequently offered electives (e.g., Reading Academic Texts), this does not fully explain the finding as several courses that are offered quite frequently were likewise only named by very few participants. For example, the 600 core course was identified by only one participant as being particularly useful and several sections of this course were offered every session as it is a required course for all students at that level.

Perhaps a more likely reason for this lack of consensus among participants may be because course efficacy was largely tied to the instructor effectiveness. This reason was alluded to by several participants and Linda, the University Preparation Program Manager, presented the matter quite succinctly. When I asked Linda about the courses she thought were particularly effective in supporting students' academic readiness, she stated:

> I think it is—a lot of it is instructor dependent. So, I would be able to tell you instructors [laughs] because I'll see the same course get really positive feedback and really negative feedback depending on who teaches it.

Instructors at Fisher's IEP generally teach a wide variety of courses, as there is a great deal of rotation in course assignments from session to session. Therefore, this variation in instructors could largely explain the fact that there was not more agreement among participants in naming particular courses that they found to be effective in preparing students for their subsequent studies.

Another facet of these findings that was unanticipated was the variability in the frequency of courses named by individual participants across the three participant groups. I had originally expected that each participant would likely identify one or two courses as being particularly helpful in academic preparation. This was generally the case with student participants ($M = 1.6$) and instructor participants ($M = 2$); however, the five administrator participants identified a total of 26 courses ($M = 5.2$) as being particularly successful in preparing students for their academic studies. In hindsight, these findings are not entirely surprising as it makes sense that those participants in administrative roles would be most inclined to perceive more courses as being effective than would participants who were instructors or students in the program. These differences in perceptions could likely be attributed to a combination of familiarity with courses (i.e., administrators were more familiar with all of the courses offered by the IEP and the goals of those courses) and by allegiance to the organization (i.e., administrators were more likely to have a greater loyalty to the IEP than would instructors or students). However, the fact that the student participants cited the fewest number of courses as being useful in their academic preparation could also be indicative of a larger issue concerning their perspectives on the general efficacy of these courses. As discussed in the previous section, student participants were primarily concerned with their immediate needs associated with the completion of successful applications in order to achieve their short-term goal of gaining admission to a degree program. Consequently, this finding could suggest that student participants identified so few English language and academic readiness courses as being useful in preparing them for their subsequent academic studies because these students did not actually perceive the value or usefulness of these courses.

The issue of IEP students at Fisher University neglecting to recognize the value of their EAP courses is one that has arisen throughout these results and will be examined at length in the subsequent discussion chapter. Despite this more global issue of student perceptions of course efficacy, it is nevertheless useful to discuss the EAP courses that were identified as being useful in students' academic preparation. Participant perceptions and my observations of these courses are presented in the following section.

Particularly Useful Courses

Overall, the Listening to Lectures course, the Study Skills and Strategies course, and the 700 core course were identified by the largest number of participants (eight, seven, and six participants, respectively) as being particularly useful in preparing students for their academic studies. These three courses are each discussed in turn in the following sections in order to provide detailed descriptions of these courses and elaborate on the aspects of these courses that may have contributed to their perceived efficacy.

Listening to Lectures Course

The Listening to Lectures course was an intermediate elective offered to students enrolled in the 600 or 700 level at Fisher's IEP. This course was identified by the most participants (i.e., a total of eight of the participants including three students, one instructor, and four administrators) as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation. This elective focused on providing students with the listening, note-taking, and vocabulary comprehension skills necessary for understanding academic lectures (see Figure 1)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

General Listening:

Students will be able to understand main ideas and almost all details of authentic lectures on various topics.

Listening for Organization & Structure:

Students will be able to understand the purpose and scope of a lecture.

Students will be able to understand the organizational patterns within a lecture.

Note-taking:

Students will be able to accurately record the main ideas and significant details of a lecture in the form of notes.

Students will be able to use their notes to participate in a variety of academic tasks based on the content of the lecture.

Vocabulary:

Students will be able to apply various strategies for improving understanding when you hear unrecognizable words or expressions during a lecture.

Students will be able to apply a variety of strategies to find, record, and recognize new transition expressions used in academic lectures.

Figure 1. Listening to Lectures Course Objectives

According to Lee and Subtirelu (2015), EAP instructors should offer students opportunities to practice academic tasks such as listening to lectures, developing note taking skills, implementing reading strategies to tackle academic texts, conducting research, and writing academic papers. The objectives of this course are directly aligned with Lee and Subtirelu's notion of EAP instruction, as this lecture listening course was intended to provide students with the opportunity to engage in some of the aforementioned academic tasks both within and outside of the language classroom.

The Listening to Lectures course was discussed at some length in Chapter 4, in reference to students' participation in the university community that resulted from the lecture observation component of the course. This course required that students observe three outside lectures as a course assignment, at least one of which must have been the observation of a Fisher university class lecture. As discussed previously, the observations of university lectures that students conducted as part of this course were highlighted by study participants as a valuable opportunity for students to increase their genuine engagement with the Fisher University community. In fact, most of the study participants who highlighted this course as being particularly useful in supporting students' academic preparation did so in conjunction with their praise of the course's lecture observation assignment. In addition to simply requiring that students complete these observations, the Listening to Lectures course also provided students with explicit resources and support in setting up these lecture observations (see Appendix E). As a result, this lecture listening strategies course gave IEP students the provisions necessary to gain rare access into the university classroom. As outlined in Chapter 4, participants placed such great value on the observations students conducted when enrolled in this

course partially due to the fact that it was the only course at the IEP that included such a lecture observation requirement. Because of the tangible nature of this course component, it was not surprising that the Listening to Lectures course was identified as being particularly useful for students' academic preparation by so many participants.

In addition to the value gained from the lecture observation component of the course, participants also seemed to greatly value the note-taking, listening, and vocabulary strategies covered within the Listening to Lectures course. Alhusain, a formerly enrolled Turkish student who had matriculated into a master's program in engineering, described the usefulness of the skills he learned in the Listening to Lectures course:

> It was a really great class to help. [The instructor] showed us how we can prepare for real lectures, how-to steps, organize, how we can make presentations, which were really helpful for me now when I try to make my presentations.

Alhusain's experience illustrates the value students placed on the explicit instruction of lecture and note-taking strategies that were taught in this course. During my observation of a Listening to Lectures class, I witnessed the instruction of such concrete academic preparation strategies. In the class I observed, the instructor provided a lesson on listening strategies that students could employ in order to listen for emphasis:

> The instructor tells students that they will be listening to a lecture on the Music Industry in today's class. She asks students to review the pre-listening questions in the textbook and then review their answers in small groups. Students take about five minutes to complete the questions independently and then another three minutes reviewing in their groups. The instructor circulates among the students during this time; answering students' questions about vocabulary or unclear answers.
>
> The whole class then comes back together and the instructor discusses listening strategies that the students can use to listen for emphasis. Using

> the textbook as the starting point of the discussion, the instructor presents some “signaling” or “cue” phrases that lecturers may use to emphasize information (e.g., I want to stress, I would like to emphasize, The crucial/essential/fundamental point is, It’s important to remember, etc.). The students then practiced this by listening to a segment of the lecture on the Music Industry and recording the instances of emphasis. Students did this independently and then the whole class reviewed the answers.
>
> After this listening strategy instruction and practice, the instructor then moved onto note-taking. She reviewed the split-page note-taking format that students had been practicing for the past two weeks. She then asked student volunteers to discuss the benefits of using this note-taking structure. For the remainder of the class, the students listened to the 10-minute lecture on the Music Industry, taking notes while doing so. Afterwards, the students worked with a partner to compare their notes and expand or revise them. The instructor collected students’ notes when the class ended and said she would return them during the next class with feedback on the notes’ content, style, and completeness.

This type of explicit instruction of concrete strategies that students could use in their subsequent academic courses was not entirely unique from the other EAP courses at Fisher’s IEP. However, most of those other EAP courses covered these strategies more tangentially and such strategies were generally not at the forefront of the course curricula. Instead, most of the EAP courses tended to mention such note-taking or specific listening strategies as an aside in the presentation of a more global language feature. In this way, the Listening to Lectures course was somewhat rare among Fisher IEP’s courses and the participants seemed to value the more practical approach to EAP instruction that was employed in this course.

Study Skills and Strategies Course

The course that was identified by the second largest number of participants as being effective in supporting students’ academic preparation (i.e., a total of seven participants including four students and three administrators) was the Study Skills and

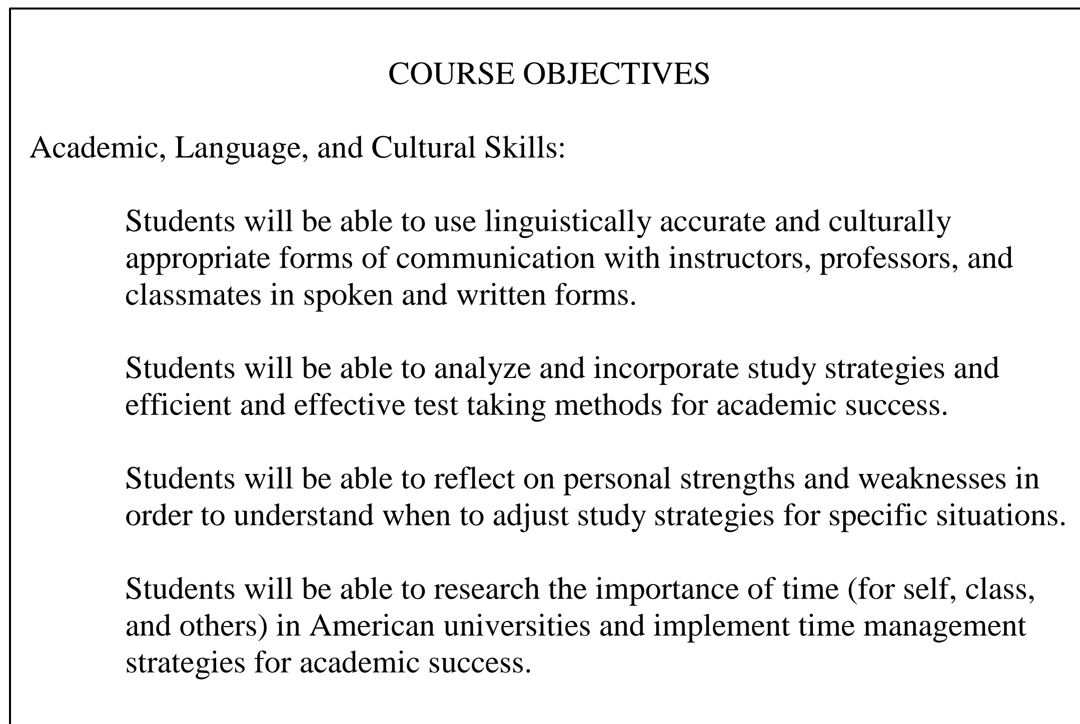
Strategies course. This course was offered as an elective to 700- and 800-level IEP students who were preparing for their transition to U.S. universities. Originally, this elective was created as a support course that was specifically designed for the University Preparation Program students who were concurrently enrolled in an undergraduate credit course at Fisher University through the credit course option that same semester. However, this proved to be a very small number of students in any given session, a point that was elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5 as a limitation of the credit course option, and thus, few IEP students were able to take advantage of this course. In an effort to provide the support this course offered to a greater number of IEP students, the credit course support course was revised in 2015. The redesigned version of the Study Skills and Strategies course still supported all IEP students enrolled in the credit course option, but was expanded to also provide support to the general population of 700- and 800-level IEP students preparing for their transition to U.S. universities. As a result, this curricular redesign also lowered the proficiency level required for students to enroll in this elective course, as only students who had successfully completed one session at the 800 level were eligible to enroll in the credit course option.

When I initially interviewed Lauren, the University Preparation Program Advising Specialist who oversaw the credit course program option, it was the session before the redesigned Study Skills and Strategies course was to be launched and she described the advantages of opening the Study Skills and Strategies course to the general IEP student population by stating:

> Adding the [Study Skills and Strategies course] to the greater IEP, not just for students taking the credit classes, I think it will be really helpful. I think a lot of the content will really help students get to see the connection

> between their IEP courses and where they are going with it and kind of all the other stuff that isn't addressed about academic skills, study skills, how to be a better learner.

Thus, by removing the prerequisite requirement associated with the credit course option and opening the Study Skills and Strategies course up to the general 700/800-level IEP population, this course was intended to fill a curricular gap in the IEP by focusing explicitly on teaching students the skills needed for academic readiness (see Figure 2).



COURSE OBJECTIVES

Academic, Language, and Cultural Skills:

> Students will be able to use linguistically accurate and culturally appropriate forms of communication with instructors, professors, and classmates in spoken and written forms.
>
> Students will be able to analyze and incorporate study strategies and efficient and effective test taking methods for academic success.
>
> Students will be able to reflect on personal strengths and weaknesses in order to understand when to adjust study strategies for specific situations.
>
> Students will be able to research the importance of time (for self, class, and others) in American universities and implement time management strategies for academic success.

Figure 2. Study Skills and Strategies Course Objectives

Interestingly, this course was cited by more student participants than any other course in response to my question about the most useful courses in preparation for their studies. Several of the student participants commented on the value they attributed to the course by focusing on the study skills covered and expressed high praise for the strategies they learned in the Study Skills and Strategies course during my interviews. Khulood, an Omani student who was applying to undergraduate programs and was enrolled in a Calculus credit course at the time of the interview, was taking Study Skills and Strategies with Lauren at the time of the interview. This was the first session that the redesigned course was offered (Spring 1 of 2016) and Khulood described the benefits of the course by explaining:

> [Study Skills and Strategies] definitely kept me motivated and make you think. It makes you go home and rethink your actions. It is about your self-improvement because if you have improved yourself all of those things that have fallen, it is like a domino effect. I think that was the most helpful class.

The benefits described above are not limited to the support and strategies that this student was able to directly apply to the credit course she was taking. Instead, Khulood was able to identify the more universal and reflective benefits that she gleaned from this course. Leizl, another Omani student applying for undergraduate admissions who was also enrolled in the same Calculus credit course, echoed Khulood's praise of the Study Skills and Strategies course and discussed this course as follows:

> Because the skills that Lauren gave us- there was this chapter where we needed to know what is a study group, so I took that and put it into action and formed my own group [for my Calculus class]. And we had a test last Tuesday and I did really good. I got my scores yesterday and I was really happy with them. I think the informal group I created was a lot of help.

Leizl's experience exemplifies not only the academic preparation resources and strategies that the Study Skills and Strategies course could provide to IEP students, but also the exceptional agency and initiative that some of these IEP students were able to demonstrate when they were given the chance to enroll in a credit course. By providing students with the academic, linguistic, and cultural skills necessary for academic readiness, this course can facilitate IEP students in becoming engaged participants in the larger university community of practice (Lave, 1991; Wenger, 2000).

All of the student participants who identified the Study Skills and Strategies course as being particularly useful were the same students who had enrolled in the credit course option. This was largely due to the fact that the redesign of the course that allowed other IEP students to elect to take the Study Skills and Strategies course occurred after I had already conducted the majority of my interviews with current student participants. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' general perspectives on this course, I decided to review the course evaluation survey data that was sent to all students enrolled in each IEP course. Since being redesigned, the Study Skills and Strategies course had run five times and received very positive course evaluations from both students and instructors. In fact, the 51 students who completed the course evaluation survey since Study Skills and Strategies was redesigned scored the summative survey item "I would recommend this course to other students" an overall average of 4.52 out of a possible score of 5. This average was considerably higher than the average score assigned to this survey item by the general population of IEP students ($M = 4.25$) during those same five sessions. Moreover, students' narrative comments on the Study Skills and Strategies course evaluations were striking. Numerous students

described this class as "interesting," "helpful," and "useful," while several students were particularly appreciative in their praise of the support this course provided them, with one student stating:

> There is no doubt in my mind that this class was the most interesting class ever in the IEP. Not only I learned about being successful in a U.S. university, but also I learned about my weakness and how to deal with American culture. I do not have enough words to describe how amazing this class was.

Another student took their acclaim for the Study Skills and Strategies course even a step further, explaining "This class was one of the things I will never forget in my life. It was a big lesson in education life and communications strategies. I believe it should be a part of every international student learning experience." As an IEP program administrator, I have been reviewing all course evaluation results at Fisher University's IEP for over five years and such hyperbolic narrative accolades of a course is certainly not the norm and in fact, is very rarely seen.

Just as was the case with the Listening to Lectures course, student and administrator participants seemed to value the practical academic readiness content that was taught in the Study Skills and Strategies course. The results indicate that student participants could more easily discern the usefulness of this course because its focus was on the concrete and tangible academic strategies and skills that students could directly transfer to their subsequent matriculated degree studies.

700 Core Course

The third course to be identified by participants as being particularly successful in supporting students' academic preparation (i.e., a total of six participants including three students, one instructor, and two administrators) was the 700 core course. This course

was an integrated skills course that all Fisher IEP students enrolled in the 700 level were required to take. As stated previously, this course had been designed to be academically focused as the large majority of students enrolled in the higher levels at Fisher's IEP had academic goals. Accordingly, the course objectives reflect the EAP nature of this course (see Figure 3).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Speaking & Listening:

Students will be able to employ various speaking strategies while discussing different academic topics and texts.

Students will be able to take notes while listening to different academic oriented materials and participate in discussions and other tasks that connect the many pieces of information and viewpoints.

Students will be able to understand and control various pronunciation features while listening and speaking to aid in comprehension and expression of ideas.

Reading & Writing:

Students will be able to read various academic text types and topics and showing understanding by examining main ideas, details, organizations, implied meanings.

Students will be able to write a multi-paragraph pieces on academic topics according to prescribed genre types, with focus on both product (timed writing) and process (take home writing).

Vocabulary & Grammar:

Students will be able to examine and use collocations, academic, idiomatic and slang language.

Students will be able to practice and control grammar structures: verb tense/aspect; subordination/coordination, modals.

Figure 3. 700 Core Course Objectives

Although this course was identified by the third highest number of participants as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation, the participants who cited this course tended to mention it in passing and did not elaborate greatly on the merits of the course. Two of the three student participants, Leizl and Alhusain, briefly declared the class as being "really good" and "very helpful," respectively. Jiao, a Chinese student applying to master's programs in design, was a bit more reflective in her description of the course's value:

> There is one teacher, for 700 core class, Andrea, she is amazing teacher. She gave us a very hard part that made me feel challenged so I want to reach her requirement for me. At that time, my English wasn't good but other classes were kind of not busy or did not have high demand so I felt her class was very hard [and] in the beginning my score was very low. Even if I felt a little bit depressed, but I want to change more, so I felt that it has changed me. I think my English improved a lot [from that class].

As mentioned previously, course efficacy is often closely linked to the effectiveness of the instructor teaching a particular course. In Jiao's testament, it is difficult to decipher how much of the credit she ascribed to this course was actually due to the course content or if it was simply a result of the value she placed on this instructor. Whether it was due to the instructor or the course itself, Jiao's praise of the 700 core course seemed to be routed in the course's challenging nature and the language improvement she made as a result of the course.

The instructor and administrator participants who named this course as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation similarly focused on the rigor of the course. Lauren, the University Preparation Program Advising Specialist, described the usefulness of the course as follows:

> I have taught 700 [core course] a lot and I thought that the new, more rigorous 700 with all skills at that level is a good pre-800 challenging course for them. If they end up taking a credit class, that course is pretty helpful.

Hence, Lauren perceived the value in this course directly as it related to preparing students for their subsequent studies. Sandra, a fulltime instructor, had similar praise for the academic preparation provided to students in the 700 core course:

> I'm a big fan of 700 core. I'm a champion of 700 core, probably because I took the TOEFL and saw how well the practices matched it. Even though not everyone agrees with me on this, I feel that the TOEFL does measure preparedness. I think if you can do it, Americans should take it too. If you can't do it, then you shouldn't go to university. I feel that the 700 class does address those practices. I tell the students, "No, that *is* really it. These are the types of things you're going to have to be able to do." So I kind of do feel that it does prepare them.

By aligning the skills taught in the 700 core course to those assessed by the TOEFL iBT exam, Sandra conceptualized this course in terms of its practicality in providing students with the skills necessary to successfully engage in university-level academic tasks.

In my observation of the 700 core class, I witnessed a lesson that covered both the more global objective of critical thinking strategies, as well as practical instruction on listening and note taking strategies. After the more abstract instruction on critical thinking strategies that can be employed when engaging with a new topic, the instructor presented some pre-listening strategies and then moved into instruction on how to listen for cause and effect in an academic lecture:

> The instructor then told the students that they would be listening for causes and effects in the lecture on Emerging Nations. The instructor used the text to review a variety of cause and effect verbs and phrases (e.g., causes, results, in, leads to, because, have an impact on, effect, impacts, etc.). The instructor told students that they should pay particular attention to these phrases while listening to the lecture.

> The instructor then led a whole class discussion about how students could represent cause and effect visually in their notes. After brainstorming for a few minutes, the instructor displayed several cause and effect graphic organizers that students could use as a basis for their notetaking. The students then listened to the 4-minute lecture on Emerging Nations. After listening, the students got into small groups and compared their notes. The instructor concluded the class by stating that the students should revise their cause and effect graphic organizers for homework and they would review the lecture notes/organizers as a whole class at the start of the next class meeting.

Although the instructor I observed did not explicitly tell students that the listening and note-taking strategies they were practicing could be directly applied to the TOEFL iBT, it was clear that practicing these types of academic listening skills would support students' preparation for the academic listening tasks on the exam.

Based on these observation and interview data, it does seem that the value participants perceived in the 700 core class could be attributed to two primary factors. First and foremost, participants recognized this course to be challenging, perhaps, more so than their other IEP electives or the 600 core course, which was only identified by one participant as being particularly useful. Secondly, the 700 core course had been redesigned in 2011 to better meet the needs of the increasingly academic bound student population at Fisher's IEP. In doing so, this integrated skills core course was designed with an EAP focus and incorporated more explicit academic readiness skill and strategy instruction. Consequently, the three EAP courses that participants identified as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation all included substantial instruction on academic readiness skills that were easy for students, instructors, and administrators to perceive and connect to students' academic goals.

Former Students' Readiness for Transition to Matriculation

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the level of academic preparation that was occurring at the IEP under investigation, I examined the experiences of the former student participants who had successfully matriculated into degree programs. It is important to note that the perspectives expressed by the five former student participants may not be entirely representative of the general student body at Fisher's IEP. After all, the former students who accepted my invitation to participate in this study tended to be successful students who had largely positive experiences while studying at Fisher's IEP. Nonetheless, it is useful to examine the experiences of such students as they can provide guidance on the types of decisions and actions that other IEP students could take in hopes of experiencing similar academic success in their transitions to subsequent degree studies.

Overall, all five of the former student participants confirmed that they generally felt prepared when they transitioned to their undergraduate or graduate degree programs after studying at Fisher's IEP. In their reflections on how their IEP studies helped them prepare for their degree courses, the former students discussed their IEP preparation in terms of two broad themes: (a) concrete academic skill development and (b) socialization and familiarization with American academic conventions. These two themes are each discussed in turn in the following sections.

Concrete Academic Skill Development

In discussing their level of preparedness when they transitioned to their degree programs, three of the former student participants highlighted the development of specific academic English skills that occurred while studying at the IEP. By reflecting on the

impact that their IEP studies had on their academic preparation in this manner, these students were able to identify the ways in which particular IEP coursework and instruction was transferable to their subsequent matriculated courses. Kamilah, a Sengalese student who was studying in an undergraduate program at the time of the interview, had only studied at Fisher's IEP for two sessions. She then enrolled in a local community college for one semester before ultimately beginning her undergraduate degree program the subsequent fall semester. Even though she had studied at the IEP for the shortest length of time of any former student participant, Kamilah still found the academic reading strategies she learned in her IEP courses to be helpful in supporting her undergraduate coursework:

> I am confident that I will be able to succeed but it requires a lot of effort. Like I think it's going better, but I'm not a good reader and every single time I need to answer questions for class it takes a lot of time. And when I was at the IEP, we practiced the strategies—like, I mean, to know how to answer the questions based on what I read. So that's actually strategies that I'm actually applying to my classes now.

In this way, Kamilah had been able to apply specific strategies that she had learned in her IEP courses to her undergraduate coursework. By utilizing this prior learning from her IEP studies, Kamilah was better able to cope with a self-identified weakness in her degree courses.

The development of academic writing strategies and conventions was also highlighted by former student participants as being helpful in their preparation for subsequent coursework. Rana, a former student from Saudi Arabia who had matriculated into an undergraduate program at Fisher University, had found several of the writing

courses she took at Fisher's IEP to be useful in preparing her for undergraduate writing classes:

Rana: I really liked the writing course I took with Sandra. It was a lot of fun because we read a lot of essays and talked it over. It was pretty similar to the courses I take. The classroom set up was very similar to the classes I take now, so it was kind of a preview, although the coursework was different. The research paper writing course, even though for most students don't like it at all, I liked it. I thought I learned how to actually do research. . . . I'm pretty sure I was the only one in class who wrote an essay. It was definitely something people didn't want to be in because it was a lot of work when we mentally were on vacation so it wasn't great. But I do feel like I did learn about how to write an essay, how to research. I've always been a good writer, but my research wasn't always that good. I didn't really completely understand. I knew what plagiarism was, but I didn't know to what extent so I didn't realize that if I used one sentence the way it was phrased, that is technically plagiarism. I didn't realize and that helped me a lot.

Sarah: So you found that what you learned in that class to be transferrable to your undergrad classes?

Rana: Yes. I am more comfortable writing essays now. I am more comfortable researching. I know how to use the library which might sound a little weird but I didn't use libraries in Saudi, so I didn't know how to look up a book or check one out and I didn't know how the process worked.

Rana's experience with these writing courses at Fisher's IEP demonstrates that the skills taught in those classes could provide useful training that students could later apply in their degree courses. However, it is also important to point out that the two courses to which Rana was referring, Research Paper Writing and Writing: Style and Rhetoric, are both 800-level electives that run only a few times each year. Further, Rana commented that most of the other students did not like the research writing course and remarked that,

"I'm pretty sure I was the only one in class who wrote an essay." Just as Rana recounted, IEP instructors have frequently complained that many of the students enrolled in the Research Paper Writing course do not actually write a research paper (the central assignment of the course) because they find it takes too much time and effort on their part. Therefore, even though these courses provided this student with an opportunity to develop important writing skills that allowed her to be better prepared for her future coursework, few IEP students were able to take advantage of these courses and even those who were enrolled may not have appreciated their value.

Another former student who described an appreciation for the writing instruction he received at Fisher's IEP was Alhusain, a Turkish student who had matriculated into a master's program in Engineering. Alhusain explained how his IEP studies had, and had not, helped prepare him for his graduate studies:

> All of those classes, of course they prepared us to improve our English, writing, so they are really important when we are writing our lab reports. . . . Honestly, I really am satisfied with writing and preparing my duties, like applications. The IEP were really great. But like I said previously, maybe a weakness of mine, when I was a manager previously, I was alone—there was no Turkish people and I had to speak English. But here there were at least 5 Turkish in the same class, so it wasn't really good for practicing. IEP maybe can create, I don't know how many countries you have here now, but maybe more diverse classes. They try to but I don't know if it's possible. But having classmates, as the same country is a terrible thing for English learning process. If you have someone from your country, you can get really easily friends because you understand each other well. When you first come here, you feel lonely but in that time if you push yourself to make other friends, which is a really important step to improve your English. Coming to another country, you need to know more information about the culture and life here.

Thus, although Alhusain recognized how his studies at the IEP had helped him to develop some of his academic English skills, he likewise expressed disappointment with his social

and cultural development while at Fisher. These few students were able to recognize how they could apply certain academic readiness and linguistic skills that they had developed while studying at Fisher's IEP to the matriculated courses in their degree programs. Although this recognition allowed these students to better appreciate the value of their IEP coursework, the development of concrete academic skills alone is not enough to support IEP students' transitions to degree study: Academic socialization and instruction on the conventions of American academia is also essential to the preparation of academically bound international students.

Academic Socialization and Familiarization with American Conventions

In considering how this IEP prepared its students for their subsequent studies, the role this IEP played in supporting students' social and cultural development surfaced as an important factor. As an intermediary step that often serves as students' first point of contact with American academia, the IEP can help to ease international student adjustment issues by providing social and cultural support (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Wesche, 2000). Four of the former student participants discussed the extent to which Fisher's IEP had provided them with such support; however, the participants reported various degrees of satisfaction with that support. Akilah, a Saudi student who was enrolled in a master's program in biotechnology, found the social and cultural development that she engaged in while studying at the IEP to be helpful in making her transition to graduate degree study easier:

> No, it definitely helped a lot. It helped just the fact with dealing with people in here [America]. I didn't get much of a cultural shock when I started because I was in an international environment before I came here when I was teaching [in Saudi Arabia]. But generally speaking, going back into a classroom—because I had been out of school for about 2 years

> before I came to the ELP, so being in a classroom setting, working on my application, even doing the university classes and auditing them—that helped me catch up because I felt slow since I haven't been in school for a while. I don't think I would do as well as I have been if it weren't for the IEP regardless of my English level. It just for me—the timing was perfect and I needed to be in a classroom again before I jumped back into a master's program. . . . I actually liked socializing. I liked being in a classroom and being on a campus, not just attending English classes. I think my favorite part was being able to audit a few classes and take a class through the program and still be able to do both things.

In Akilah's case, studying at Fisher's IEP helped ease her back into the university classroom, while at the same time providing her with a scaffolded entrance into the university community of practice.

Other student participants commented on more specific aspects of American academia that Fisher's IEP had helped to familiarize them with during their studies. Dastan, a Kazak student who had just completed a yearlong Master of Laws program, described how his studies at Fisher's IEP had helped facilitate his transition to that graduate program:

> Actually I would emphasize one thing that I got from IEP. After IEP, I saw these things at George Washington University. We learned how to add and drop classes online. Absolutely same things I did when I started my academic degree. It was really helpful for me.

I was surprised that this student had highlighted such a seemingly menial aspect of the university experience (i.e., registering for courses online) as being particularly helpful in supporting his academic preparation. However, administrative tasks such as these can be quite overwhelming for international students and by first encountering this process at the IEP, this student was able to rely on the IEP to walk him through this culturally laden process.

Despite feeling generally prepared for their studies, all of the former students described some type of linguistic and/or academic difficulties that they encountered in their degree programs. Rana, the Saudi student who had discussed the support her IEP writing courses provided her in her undergraduate courses, was particularly reflective on the ways in which her IEP studies did and did not prepare her for the challenges and conventions of American academia:

> I think they tried to do this, but it didn't really work but we weren't really paying much attention, so I guess it is our fault. College classes are a lot more rigorous, more tiring that high school courses and I don't think I fully understood that. I didn't realize how much work I needed to put in. [The IEP] did give us a glimpse, but it was still nothing compared to college, so I guess it's not as much as the IEP did more, as much as I realized that I needed the practice in hindsight, I guess. Also, we don't take notes in high school. It's a different system. I know the American system is different. I didn't know how to take notes. I took too detailed of notes and I kind of copied verbatim which wasn't right. I learned it now. It's been 2 years, I've learned to take notes but in the first year I was really overwhelmed with taking notes. . . . They told us what was wrong but didn't really teach us what was right or how to fix it. Again, I don't think it was the IEP as much as it was us not being motivated enough to study. A lot of us had good English. We were really good students, we thought we had it all covered and we don't really need to pay attention and the courses in the second semester were just to fill our time, so we neglected them a lot so I do regret neglecting those but it was more of my fault for not paying attention or not realizing that this could really help. . . . But I don't really know how else the IEP can do that. It's hard. I guess they could ask previous ELP students to come back and talk to the new generation.

Although Rana was able to recognize that the IEP was trying to prepare her and her classmates for the rigor that they would ultimately face in their matriculated coursework, she reported that the IEP had not been particularly effective in doing so. Whether that fault lay with the students themselves, as Rana suggested, or with the fact that Fisher's IEP had only managed to give students "a glimpse, but it was still nothing compared to

college," will be discussed further in the next chapter. Once again, the findings indicate that getting international students to "buy-in" to the preparation they were receiving at the IEP and devote their time to that academic and linguistic preparation remained a fundamental challenge.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a description of the findings that address the third research question in this dissertation study: How well do IEPs prepare international students for their transition into matriculated undergraduate and graduate degree programs? Participant interviews revealed a fundamental difference in the conceptualization of student needs and the function of the IEP across the three participant groups with students focused on the immediate needs associated with their short-term academic goals of gaining university admission, instructors concentrating on students' long-term goals of successful degree completion, and administrators representing a more balanced understanding of the duality of the IEP's function in meeting students' needs. Although the three participant groups possessed different understandings of the ways in which the IEP should address students' needs, several EAP courses were nevertheless identified as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation. The identified courses all provided significant amounts of explicit instruction on academic readiness skills, which were easily perceptible to students, instructors, and administrators in addressing students' academic goals. The former IEP student participants who had transitioned into undergraduate or graduate degree programs reported that they generally felt prepared for their matriculated studies. The development of concrete academic skills along with the academic socialization support that the IEP provided students in familiarizing them with

the conventions of American academia were both cited as supporting students' academic preparation in their transition to degree study. On the whole, this IEP seemed to provide many of the resources necessary to adequately prepare international students for their subsequent degree studies. However, the fundamental challenge faced by this IEP lies in persuading students of the long-term benefits they will receive when they devote their time and attentional resources to their IEP studies.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The central purpose of this study was to investigate the role that one IEP played in supporting its international students' ability to successfully gain admittance to, enroll in, and, ultimately, achieve academic success in university degree programs. Utilizing a situated learning perspective, I have theoretically analyzed the process of academic socialization that these students undertook as they engaged in their IEP coursework in preparation for their subsequent university studies. The findings from this study revealed that this IEP was providing its students with concrete resources to support their college choice process, while at the same time striving to develop students' linguistic and academic readiness skills for their transition to matriculated study. However, these aims were accomplished at varying levels of success. Further, the data indicated that there existed fundamental discrepancies in the ways in which the function and purpose of both the program itself and individuals' roles were conceptualized among the various participant groups. These findings suggest that university-based IEPs with academically bound student populations need to look beyond their role as simply one of English language instruction. Instead, such IEPs must adjust the way in which they conceptualize the function of their program so that, in addition to providing language support, the organization is also equipped with the resources necessary to provide academically bound international students with the college choice support and academic readiness skills needed to attain their academic goals.

In this chapter, I first provide a discussion of how the utilization of situated learning theory allowed me to examine this IEP as a community of practice in itself, while also serving to broker students' access to the university community of practice. I then explore the ways in which IEPs can be reconceptualized to best support students' academic socialization into American universities by presenting an analysis of the two aforementioned IEP functions: (a) college choice process support and (b) facilitating linguistic and academic readiness.

The IEP through a Situated Learning Lens

When examining this university-based IEP through the construct of situated learning theory, it is important to acknowledge that this organization cannot be understood as a simple, discrete community of practice. Instead, the complex nature of this IEP as it functions in relation to the university community of practice must also be investigated. In order to theorize the IEP as a community of practice, we must first remember its purpose: Academically bound international students enroll in IEPs with the explicit goal of becoming full-fledged members of the university community of practice. The IEP thus endeavors to prepare these students for their eventual engagement and membership in specific academic discourse communities. However, the ways in which many IEPs try to accomplish this preparation appears to contradict a central tenet of this social learning theory—that knowledge is socially constructed through an individual's collaborative participation in community practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2009). How then can we understand the learning that students engage in at an IEP when that learning is not actually situated in the genuine community of practice to which they are striving to gain membership?

The fact that most IEPs are organized to provide instruction independently, apart from the context of the target academic discourse community, is largely the result of the structural constraints faced by such IEPs. The vast majority of universities are not willing to enroll students in degree programs until they are able to demonstrate a certain level of English proficiency. As a result, university-based IEPs must fill the gap by functioning as intermediary organizations where such students can work to improve their linguistic and academic readiness skills. However, until these students actually gain matriculated student status, they remain on the periphery, and often outside, of the university community of practice while they study at an IEP. Consequently, IEPs are prevented from providing their students with sufficient opportunities for meaningful experiential learning in the "real" university community of practice (Wenger, 2009). Instead, these programs try to give their students instructional experiences that simulate the practices of that community. This artificiality is an inherent limitation to the structure and function of such IEPs. However, these structural constraints are so embedded within the system of American academia that they are unlikely to change. Therefore, IEPs must come to terms with these constraints and determine how best to prepare their students in light of such limitations.

Despite the complexity inherent to understanding the IEP as a standalone community of practice, situated learning theory remains a useful framework for analyzing the practices and individuals under investigation in this dissertation. Understanding learning through this construct has allowed me to identify the gap between the practices students are engaging in while studying at the IEP and the authentic participation in the social learning system (i.e., the university classroom) that these practices are meant to

simulate. The IEP, then, is tasked with connecting their students to the university community of practice by brokering their students' entry into those academic discourse communities. IEP instructors can function as such "brokers" as they "introduce elements from one practice into another" (Wenger, 2000, p. 235). Further, this conceptual framework has provided me with a means to understand the boundaries between communities and the learning that occurs at those boundaries. According to Wenger (2000), boundaries should not be viewed with a negative connotation in this framework, but instead as an innate characteristic of the conceptualization as "the very notion of community of practice implies the existence of boundary" (p. 232). In light of that understanding, Wenger argued that boundaries are important for two reasons: "they connect communities and they offer learning opportunities in their own right" (p. 233). When discussing such boundaries, Wenger claimed that brokers can serve as a bridge across boundaries as they establish connections and transport knowledge from one community of practice to another. Accordingly, IEP students themselves can also function as brokers in this capacity when they engage in boundary encounters. In this case, a clear boundary existed between the IEP community of practice and the university community of practice. It is within such boundaries between communities of practice in a larger system that interactions and brokering of knowledge occurs (See Figure 4).

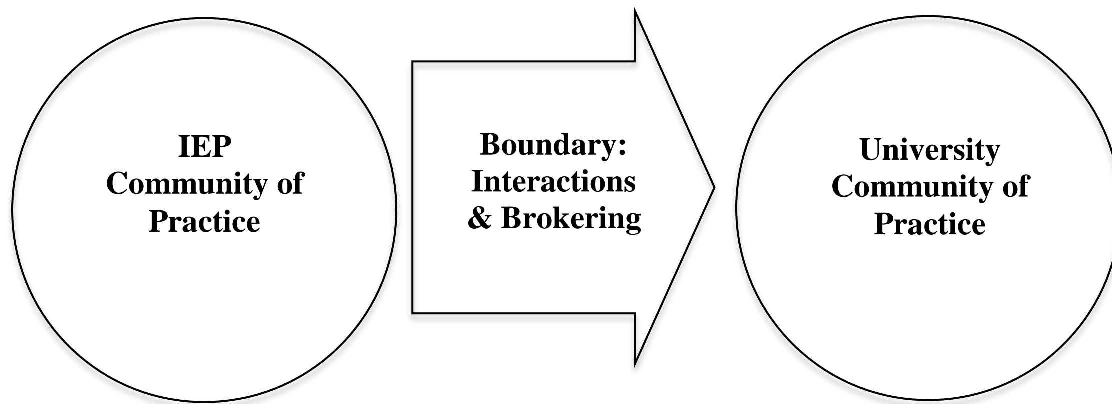


Figure 4. Boundary between Communities of Practice.

Because IEP students are not yet afforded official membership into the university community of practice, the IEP must look for opportunities in which they can support their students as they cross the boundary into that community. One way to do so is through boundary encounters, which are a beneficial site for learning as they can "provide direct exposure to a practice" (Wenger, 2000, p. 236). The findings of this study indicate that the boundary encounters student participants experienced through facilitated observations of university courses were valued interactions that supported the academic socialization of these students. In addition, enrollment in credit-bearing courses allowed the few students who were able to take advantage of this program feature the opportunity to engage in simultaneous participation in these two communities of practice. This proved to be an instrumental experience for these students as it allowed IEP students to construct their identities by negotiating membership to multiple communities (Wenger, 2009).

In this chapter, I explore ways in which the IEP is already brokering such boundary encounters and simultaneous participation in the university community of practice, while analyzing opportunities for this program to expand students' access to such interactions. However, I first discuss the support the academically bound students at this IEP received as they engaged in the applications and admissions processes by considering the function of the IEP community of practice as the site of learning about the college choice process.

College Choice Process Support

As the number of university-based IEPs in the United States have expanded in recent years to serve the growing population of international students wishing to study in the United States, many of these IEPs now function as a bridge to enrollment in American undergraduate or graduate degree programs for their increasingly academic student populations (IIE, 2016; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). Accordingly, such IEPs have shifted their curricula to focus on EAP instruction in recognition of their students' academic needs. In addition to their need for academic preparation, students enrolled in IEPs at universities that do not offer conditional admission programs must also apply and gain admission to a degree program during their IEP studies. Successful navigation of the college choice process is thus a time consuming and ever important need for these students.

In response to their students' academic goals, the IEP at Fisher University created and then expanded the University Preparation Program to serve as the organizational assistance for students engaged in the college-going process. The findings from this study indicate that the formal support structure offered by this program provided the

students who took advantage of the available resources with sufficient assistance as they engaged in the applications and admissions processes. Conversely, the informal applications and admissions support offered to students by instructors was found to be lacking. Instructors' disengagement from students' college choice process can be most clearly understood in relation to the fundamental difference in the way in which these instructors viewed their roles in meeting the needs of their students as opposed to how their students perceived the function of the IEP in meeting their needs. In the following sections, I utilize the framework of situated learning theory to first delineate the formal college choice support offered by the University Preparation Program at this IEP and then move on to an examination of the informal support opportunities for students engaged in the college choice process.

Formal Structures of College Choice Support

The University Preparation Program at Fisher University offered IEP students substantial resources to help them navigate the college choice process and develop students' academic readiness. These formal supports included a variety of college-going support courses (i.e., application support courses, test preparation courses, and an academic skills course), open information sessions, the option to enroll in a credit-bearing course, and one-on-one advising sessions. The findings indicate that student participants benefitted from all four of the aforementioned program features; however, these features were utilized by students at varying rates and were perceived to have differing levels of utility. The feature that was perceived by student participants to be the most useful component of the program was the one-on-one advising offered by University Preparation Program administrators and instructors. The findings suggested that students

most greatly valued this program feature due to the individualized attention, development of interpersonal relationships, and management of student expectations that occurred in these advising sessions. In regards to the other three University Preparation Program features, the courses offered by the program were also perceived to be helpful in providing students with applications support in the writing of their essays and statements, as well as through test preparation and academic readiness skill development. The credit course option was professed to be an extremely valuable academic preparation experience for the few students who were able to take advantage of the program feature; however, its narrow reach limited the impact of this resource and it was not intended to support students' college choice process. In contrast, student participants did not ascribe much worth to the open information sessions offered by the University Preparation Program. In light of these results, the question then arises as to how the formal support structure offered at this IEP is maintained, revised, and/or expanded to ensure that the program functions in a manner that is most aligned with students' needs and expectations. In response to this question, I present further analysis of several of the aforementioned results along with a discussion of opportunities for program modifications.

The fact that the one-on-one advising offered by the University Preparation Program was identified as the most valuable source of college choice support is an important finding that should not be overlooked. International students who attend IEPs in preparation for matriculated degree studies face the enormous challenge of completing the college choice process under even greater constraints than those faced by their American peers. First and foremost, most of these international students are coping with a very limited timeframe under which they must complete the college choice process.

According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), the search and choice phases of the college choice process generally are undertaken during a span of three years by high school students preparing for undergraduate studies. Likewise, choosing a graduate school to attend is a "multistage decision process affected by a variety of factors involving the student's characteristics, information gathering, college actions, and college/program characteristics" (Kallio, 1995, p. 110). According to Kallio (1995), students applying to graduate programs also encounter considerations related to their life stage development, with older students facing spouse, familial, and work-related concerns in their college choice decisions. In regard to the timing associated with and the complicated nature of the college choice process, international students generally arrive at the IEP with a limited understanding of this process. Moreover, many of these students enter the IEP with deadlines and time limits for enrollment in degree programs that have been predetermined by their university or government sponsors prior to their arrival at the IEP and without any assessment or consideration of their English language proficiency. For the students who participated in this dissertation study, the average length of IEP studies was 6.3 months for current student participants and 10.2 months for the former student participants. Because these students were afforded a much shorter period of time in which to engage in the college choice process, Fisher's IEP was tasked with providing its students with specialized support to help accommodate this expedited process. Access to several one-on-one advising sessions each week emerged as the most prominent and valuable means of such specialized support for these students.

In addition to a limited timeframe, the international students at Fisher's IEP faced the additional disadvantage of lacking the cultural and social capital specific to the

American college choice process. Because Fisher's IEP is an expensive program at a prestigious university, most of these students came from financially privileged backgrounds with college-educated parents. Generally, college-educated parents are "more likely to be able to provide their children with concrete advice about college choices and applications than non-college-educated parents based on their own experiences of college and information they gain from their networks of college-educated friends and acquaintances" (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, p. 100). However, the large majority of these student participants had parents who had not completed their degrees at American universities and thus, these students did not possess all of the "family capital" that American students from similarly privileged backgrounds would enjoy. Perhaps because their parents could not offer their children culturally specific college choice knowledge nor were they physically present to provide hands-on support, the students at this IEP demonstrated a strong reliance on the University Preparation Program advisors for their college choice support and information. This heavy reliance on institutional agents for applications and admissions support more closely resembles that of American students with non-college-educated parents. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), the American students without such family capital who were found to be successful were those who relied on constant consultation with their high school counselors through the college choice process to compensate for the lack of parental guidance. Despite lacking some of this culturally specific knowledge and hands-on parental support, the IEP students under investigation certainly possessed other forms of capital. First of all, their middle to upper class habitus predisposed these students to university study in the first place. In addition, the students at Fisher University had the luxury of being able to attend

very expensive universities, as tuition cost was not generally a concern for these students. Further, these students were afforded with the privilege of enrolling in an IEP where they were not hesitant to seek the college choice support to which they felt entitled. As a result, the one-on-one advising sessions proved to be an essential means of support for the academically bound international students at Fisher's IEP.

Despite the benefits that students gained from their participation in the one-on-one advising through the University Preparation Program, an overreliance on this resource can be problematic and may be indicative of the need for some program revisions. Individual advising sessions might be the most effective way for IEP students to receive college choice support; however, it is certainly not the most efficient means of information dissemination for the University Preparation Program administrators nor is it a sustainable program model. Fisher's IEP was fortunate to have had three fulltime University Preparation Program administrators who provided one-on-one advising throughout the year, along with another two or three instructors who delivered additional advising support during peak application season. Nevertheless, there were times when even this robust team of advisors could not meet all of the advising needs of their students and as a result, some students may not have been able to secure as many advising sessions as they would have liked to attend. Moreover, other university-based IEPs may not have the resources available to employ so many advisors. Although, there is currently little information available on the college choice support resources provided by other IEPs, I would postulate that students at most IEPs in the United States have much more limited access to individualized advising support. As a result, allowing

international students to rely so heavily on IEP provided one-on-one advising for all of their college choice support is not a wise program model to promote.

In order to address students' overreliance on the advising support, the IEP at Fisher University should consider how some of students' college choice needs could be better addressed in a different forum—perhaps within the University Preparation courses or through open information sessions. More specifically, the findings indicated that the open information sessions offered by the University Preparation Program were not highly valued by students. Student participants reported that they preferred to receive the college choice information that was intended to be delivered in these information sessions in the forum of advising sessions or their University Preparation courses. In addition, the one-off nature of these sessions and their scripted delivery seemed to feel impersonal to these students who, in contrast, so appreciated the relationships they formed in their advising sessions and, to a lesser extent, with their University Preparation course instructors.

Students' dissatisfaction with the open information sessions in their current format suggests the need to revise the structure and format of this University Preparation Program resource. Perhaps rather than simply providing one-off sessions to which students can informally drop-in, these information sessions could be revised to function as several series of workshops. These workshop series could be targeted at specific subsets of students and could require students to commit to attending the series of several sessions. This could potentially take the form of a course that would meet weekly or bi-weekly throughout the session. Additionally, it may be beneficial to change the scripted nature of these sessions and make these workshops more participatory for the students. It

is conceivable that if the same group of students were to meet with the same advisor over a series of weeks or months in these information sessions, the students could guide topic selection and the discussions of those topics could develop over the span of several meetings. If such revisions were made, the students may find the information sessions more personally relevant and consequently, more valuable.

When examining the college choice support offered by this IEP, it is useful to consider how the formal support structure of the University Preparation Program itself functioned as a community of practice. The current structure of the program did not fully facilitate the establishment of an active community of learners who were engaged in consistent interaction (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). One way that the program could enable the development of communities of practice around the college choice process would be through the aforementioned reorganization of the information session format. If the open information sessions were restructured to function as more regularly meeting workshop groups, this alteration would have the added benefit of increasing student-to-student interactions and creating a stronger community of practice from which students could receive additional peer support. If revised in this manner, these information sessions could function as a site of situated learning in which the participating students could develop a shared practice as they co-engaged in their learning about the college choice process (Lave, 1991).

Opportunities for Informal College Choice Support

In contrast to the substantial amount of formal college choice support that IEP students received through the University Preparation Program, the results of this study revealed that students did not receive much informal college choice support from their

IEP instructors. This finding was surprising. I had anticipated that IEP instructors would have played a prominent role in supporting their academically bound students through the college choice process. After all, these instructors have almost daily interaction with their students, many of whom are noticeably consumed with the college choice process. Instead, I discovered that instructors played only a peripheral role in providing their students with support through the applications and admissions process. This limited college choice engagement resulted from the fact that these instructors did not see their role as one of college choice support and consequently, did not participate significantly in this process with their students. One reason instructors seemed to remove themselves from this process may have been because they perceived the formal support provided by the University Preparation Program to be so robust. Because instructors saw the University Preparation Program as a comprehensive support structure, they had made the decision to relegate this support to the University Preparation "experts." Moreover, instructors' lack of involvement in the college choice process stemmed from the fundamental way in which instructors conceived of the IEP's function and their role in meeting their students' needs.

In order to fully understand the reasoning behind why instructors at this IEP did not engage more fully in their students' college choice process, it is important to recall how these instructors understood their position in the organization and role in addressing students' needs. As discussed extensively in the results chapters, the instructor participants who I interviewed for this study were most concerned with supporting students' long-term goals of undergraduate or graduate degree attainment. Based on their long-term focus, these instructors viewed their role as one of linguistic and academic

readiness skill development. This understanding of instructors' roles in IEP instruction is not unanticipated, as it is aligned with much of the research on EAP objectives and outcomes (Biber et. al, 2002; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Fox et. al, 2014; Hartshorn et. al, 2017; Hyland, 2006; Hyland, 2016; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). Nevertheless, instructors' reluctance to expand their focus to also include support of students' short-term goals was unpredicted. In nearly direct opposition to their instructors, the students were almost wholly focused on their short-term goal of obtaining university admission. Thus, existed a fundamental difference in the way in which these two groups understood the function of the IEP in the college choice process.

The fact that students were not receiving more informal support from their instructors as they engaged in the college choice process is an important finding because it represents a lost opportunity of support for those students. As stated previously, the academically bound international students studying at this IEP faced real challenges in the applications and admissions processes and they relied heavily on the University Preparation Program advisors to help them to overcome those challenges. Certainly, those advisors were particularly well-equipped to support these academically bound students and I do not question the specialized knowledge or expertise that the University Preparation Program administrators possessed. Nevertheless, I argue that the IEP instructors also hold important cultural and social capital relevant to the college choice process that they could impart to their students both within and outside of the classroom. Moreover, the organizational separation between students' academic English instruction and the college choice process that existed at this IEP may have also served to exacerbate the discrepancy in students' and instructors' understandings of the IEP function. If

instructors were encouraged to incorporate applications and admissions support into their instruction, it is likely that these students would not have seen these two aspects of their IEP studies as being so at odds with one another. In addition, integrating college choice support into their courses could have resulted in students' greater appreciation of their IEP courses and consequently, those students may have been less likely to neglect those courses.

By examining the opportunities for informal college choice process support through a situated learning lens, it becomes apparent that instructors' limited involvement in the process impacted students' ability to participate in shared learning about the college choice process with their academically bound peers (Lave, 1991). All of the students enrolled in the University Preparation Program had a shared goal: to obtain admission to an undergraduate or graduate program and to successfully attain their degree from that program. In order to meet this shared goal, these students were engaged in the college choice process and, at the same time, working to develop their linguistic and academic readiness skills. Despite their shared goals and practices, learners are only able to form a functioning community of practice when they "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). Because the instructors in the general IEP courses at Fisher University were not providing students with the aforementioned opportunities for college choice process engagement in their instructional practices, students were prevented from forming such college choice communities of practice within the IEP classroom. This suggests the need to encourage IEP instructors to integrate opportunities for learning about the college choice process into their classroom instruction. After all, learning how

to negotiate the college choice process is an important first step in becoming fully acculturated into American academia. By gaining expertise about this process in their general IEP classes, these students would be simultaneously developing their ability to participate in an academic community of practice (Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Nonetheless, expanding IEP instructors' roles in providing college choice process support both within and outside of the classroom would require an organizational shift in the conceptualization of the dual functions served by this IEP.

Facilitating Linguistic and Academic Readiness

In addition to helping students navigate the college choice process, this IEP's primary focus was on supporting its academically bound international students in the development of the linguistic proficiency and academic readiness skills necessary to attain their educational goals. University-based IEPs have long striven to provide English language instruction that is "grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistic demands of academic target situations" (Hyland, 2006, p. 2). In order to achieve this aim, IEPs have employed the pedagogical approach of EAP during the past few decades (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). At the IEP at Fisher University, such EAP instruction has largely taken the form of integrated skills, content-based, and/or skill specific courses that seek to simulate the common academic contexts and communicative behaviors in which students will later engage when enrolled in their undergraduate or graduate degree programs.

In examining the perceived efficacy of the EAP courses offered at this IEP, the findings suggest that students, instructors, and administrators possessed different understandings of the function of the IEP and the role of these courses in meeting

students' needs. Nevertheless, there were some commonalities in the EAP courses that were identified as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation. The identified courses all provided students with substantial instruction on academic readiness skills. In the three EAP courses that were identified, this academic skill instruction was explicit and thus, the ways in which these courses were addressing students' academic goals was easily perceptible to students, instructors, and administrators. Despite the cited benefits of these courses, it is impossible to ignore an overarching curricular concern: Students' appreciation of and attention to their academic language development was overshadowed by their focus on the more immediate needs associated with the college choice process. Based on these findings, it appears that the current model of academic preparation is not functioning as well as it could if some modifications were made to the structure and format of the academic readiness preparation. In particular, I discuss the notion that skills-based EAP courses in isolation may not be sufficient in supporting IEP students' academic socialization and preparation. Further, I examine the IEP's affiliation with the larger university community and the possible benefits associated with further developing that relationship.

Skills-Based EAP in Isolation is Not Enough

In contrast to the value student participants attributed to the college choice support they obtained at Fisher University's IEP, the findings of this study revealed students' underappreciation of the linguistic and academic readiness skill development that they were receiving in their general EAP courses. In fact, most of the student participants were so focused on their short-term goal of receiving university admission, that they tended to overlook the more comprehensive needs associated with their English

language proficiency. Such a limited understanding of the role that their English language abilities would play in helping them to achieve their academic goals is problematic as most of these students did demonstrate real English language needs. Hence, the fact that some of these students were not adequately attending to their linguistic development while studying at the IEP represents a lost opportunity for those students who could have benefitted from that instruction to be better able to perform in their matriculated academic courses and to ultimately succeed in their degree programs. It is therefore important to more fully investigate why the current model of general skills-based EAP instruction offered by this IEP was not more greatly appreciated by the students who participated in this study.

The IEP at Fisher University had largely taken an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), as opposed to an English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), approach to its course design and delivery. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), EGAP is "the teaching of the skills and language that are common to all disciplines" (p. 41). By adopting an EGAP approach, the courses at this IEP focused their instruction on the general academic skill development that students would need to participate in such broad academic tasks as listening to lectures, participating in course lectures and seminars, reading academic texts, and writing a variety of academic genres. These skills were predominantly taught through "carrier content," which artificially contextualized the language skills under examination within a generic academic topic (Hyland, 2006, p. 18). The reason the IEP at Fisher University had implemented an EGAP approach to its courses appears to be predominantly logistical in nature: This IEP must provide instruction to students from a wide variety of academic disciplines and

consequently, it would have been more challenging for this IEP to take an ESAP approach to teach discipline-specific skills and features.

It is important to note that there were a few exceptions to this overall approach: Three ESAP courses were offered at Fisher's IEP. An English for Science, English for Engineering, and a Reading, Writing, and Speaking Critically about Science course had each been created in recent years to support the large number of STEM students studying at Fisher's IEP. However, only three student participants had taken one of these courses during their IEP studies. The reason why more student participants did not elect to take these more English for STEM courses did not arise in the data; however, these courses were often faced with low enrollments and did not run as frequently as did many of the other advanced elective courses during the period of data collection for this study. It may be in part due to their less frequent offerings that the few ESAP courses that were included in the curriculum at Fisher's IEP were rarely cited by participants as being especially useful in students' academic preparation. Nonetheless, the low enrollments associated with these courses are indicative of the challenge IEPs with heterogeneous student populations face when attempting to incorporate discipline specificity into their curricula.

When examining the value students attributed to the EAP courses at this IEP, it is also useful to consider the question: What role does the EAP instruction offered by a university-based IEP play in addressing the diverse expectations of different disciplines within academia? In order to answer this question, it is useful to consider the different ways in which EAP can be conceptualized. According to Hyland (2006), there has been

a sequential development of three main conceptions of EAP: a study skills approach, a disciplinary socialization approach, and an academic literacies approach (See Figure 5).

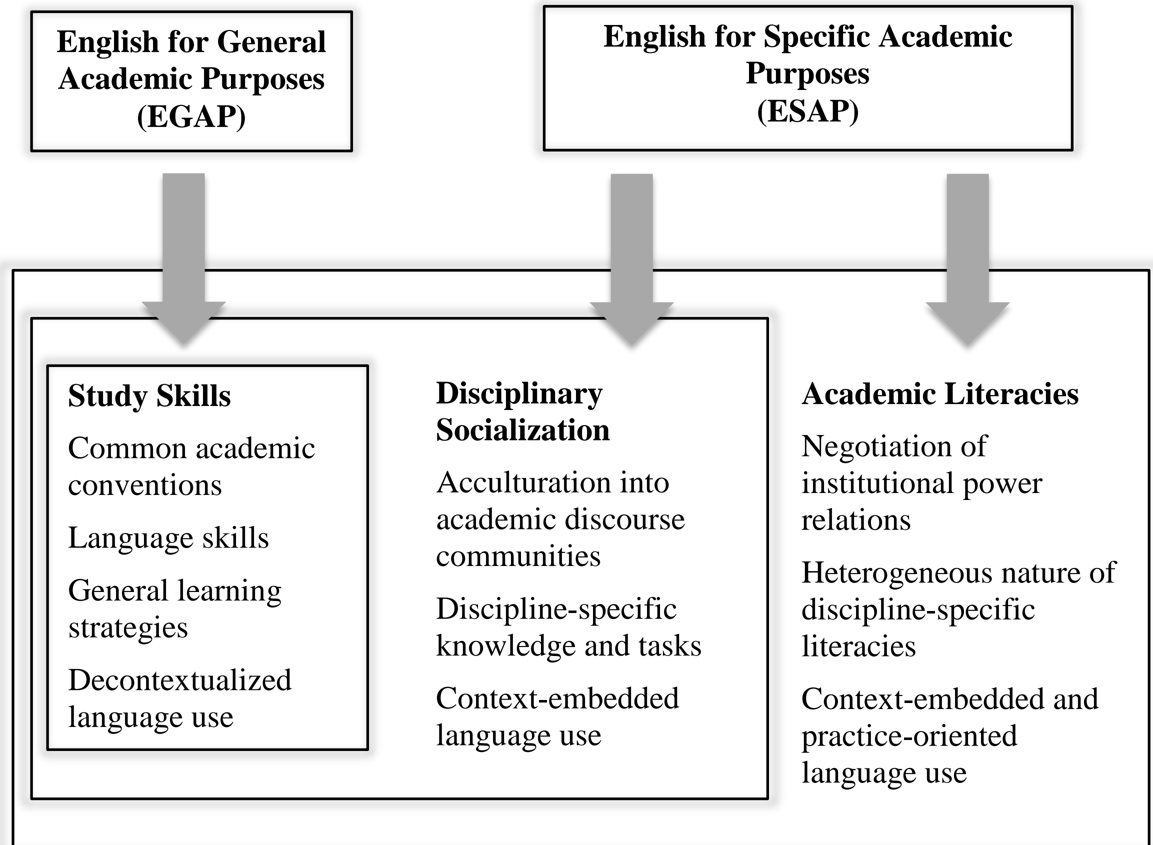


Figure 5. Approaches to EAP Instruction
Note. The descriptors for this figure are partially based on information presented in Hyland (2006, 2016) and Lea & Street (2000).

Although these three approaches were conceptualized successively, they should not be understood linearly and are not mutually exclusive from one another (Lea & Street, 2000). Instead, each of the three approaches should be thought of as building upon the previously conceived model. The first of these three approaches to EAP is the study

skills approach, which focuses on common skills and strategies that can be widely applied to any academic context. The study skills approach includes instruction on both language skills (e.g., lecture listening, reading comprehension, note taking, etc.) and general learning strategies (e.g., goal setting, time management, etc.). Accordingly, the general focus of the study skills approach makes it the model that is most closely aligned to EGAP. However, by concentrating on the generic academic conventions that are purported to be common to all disciplines, the study skills approach is largely restricted to presenting language use in a decontextualized manner (Hyland, 2016). Nevertheless, IEPs have relied upon this EAP approach when they do not have access to disciplinary communities of practice.

The disciplinary socialization approach to EAP arose out of, and partially in response to, the study skills approach as a "more discipline-sensitive and discourse-based approach which saw learning as an induction or acculturation into a new culture rather than an extension of existing skills" (Hyland, 2006, p. 19). As opposed to the study skills approach, disciplinary socialization focuses instruction on the language students must use to participate in discipline-specific academic contexts. In this way, this approach conceptualizes the university and individual classrooms as academic discourse communities. In the same way that the disciplinary socialization approach does, the academic literacies approach "frames language as discourse practices, the ways language is used in particular contexts, rather than as a set of discrete skills" (Hyland, 2006, p. 21). However, the academic literacy approach expands upon the disciplinary socialization model by taking a more critical view of the ways in which institutional practices and

power relationships influence students' identities and their ability to participate in academic literacy practices (Lea & Street, 2000).

Both the disciplinary socialization approach and the academic literacies approach are focused on the discipline-specific context of learning and can therefore be understood as E*S*AP approaches. By emphasizing the importance of learners' participation in the practices of specific academic discourse communities as they construct their identities and engage in meaning making, these two approaches are aligned with a situated view of learning (Wenger, 2009). In contrast, the IEP under examination has primarily operated under the study skills approach by providing E*G*AP courses in which skills-based instruction was largely taught in isolation. The findings from this study suggest that this largely decontextualized approach to EAP was not fully appreciated by student participants and as a result, may not have been sufficiently preparing the IEP's academically bound students for their discipline-specific studies. Herein lies the fundamental challenge faced by such IEPs: How can these programs provide EAP instruction that prepares heterogeneous student populations for their future academic studies across a wide range of disciplines?

The debate over specificity in English language instruction is not new, nor has it been limited to the field of EAP. This issue of how best to address the discipline-specific nature of academic tasks and conventions has long been contested in the realm of second language writing as well. Nearly 30 years ago, Spack (1988) put forth an argument for the teaching of general academic writing and contended that teachers of English "should leave the teaching of writing in the disciplines to the teachers of those disciplines" (p. 30). After conducting a longitudinal case study of an undergraduate student's academic

literacy development years later, Spack (1997) had somewhat altered her stance on specificity and contended that "our work in ESL courses is vulnerable, that academic skills are not fixed, that academic tasks can be understood only within specific contexts, that all academic work is socially situated" (p. 50). This later view moved closer to that expressed by Hyland (2002), who argued of the centrality of specificity in language instruction and concluded that "expertise in a subject means being able to use its discourses in the specific ways that one's readers are likely to find effective and persuasive" (p. 393). Not only has research shown that academic discourses and tasks are specific to certain disciplines (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992; Gardner & Nesi, 2012; Hartshorn et. al, 2017; Horowitz, 1986; Hyland, 2006, 2016; Krause, 2014; Prior, 1998; Spack, 1997), the importance of a student's English language competence itself has been found to vary from one academic discipline to the next (Chang & Kanno, 2010). Nevertheless, such scholars have acknowledged the challenges associated with addressing specificity in ESL courses through the implementation of an ESAP approach. Hyland (2002) recognized the inherent challenge to balancing the needs of heterogeneous groups of students from different fields, while Spack (1997) succinctly described the overarching difficulty of the issue:

> Given this complexity within a single discipline, given that students move through several disciplines as they fulfill graduation requirements, and given that ESL faculty cannot have expertise in all of the disciplines, we need to be realistic in our expectations of what can be accomplished in ESL programs.

In an effort to avoid the complex considerations associated with providing discipline-specific language instruction, the IEP at Fisher University chose to instead maintain a general approach to its EAP instruction.

When situated learning theory is employed to examine this issue, the problematic nature of the EGAP approach implemented by Fisher's IEP becomes ever more apparent. After all, academically bound international students were not enrolled in this IEP to learn English simply for the sake of leaning. Students were enrolled in these EAP courses for explicitly instrumental learning purposes: The EAP instruction offered at this IEP was intended to support students' academic socialization into American academia. In order to do so, the IEP at Fisher University attempted to simulate the university classroom with the aim of preparing its students for their subsequent entry into an undergraduate or graduate degree program. Despite these intentions, the utilization of a study skills approach to EAP instruction at this IEP was not meeting students' needs in supporting their socialization into academic discourse communities. This was in part due to the fact that these skills-based EAP courses were too decontextualized. As such, students had difficulty perceiving the value of the language skills and study strategies in isolation because they were largely unable to relate this learning to their participation in the academic community that they aimed to join.

Under a study skills approach to EAP instruction, this IEP struggled with a problem that is common to the education sector in that learning in this organization was sometimes viewed as "not only a means to an end: it is the end product" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 5). Because the EAP instruction at Fisher's IEP was delivered out of context, the students were not able to understand the ways in which that learning would allow them to engage in the practices particular to a discipline-specific academic community. As a result, these students were not able to fully appreciate the learning that was occurring in their IEP courses nor could they recognize

the ways in which the skills they were acquiring in those courses would benefit them in their later degree studies. Further, the simulated nature of the language skills and study strategies instruction did not allow students to cross over the IEP community of practice boundary by brokering opportunities for authentic participation in academic discourse communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger 2009). Recall the statement that Rana, the former student who had matriculated into Fisher University as an undergraduate student, had made in regards to her preparation for degree studies: "I didn't realize how much work I needed to put in. The IEP did give us a glimpse, but it was still nothing compared to college." Therefore, it seems that the skills-based structure of the IEP courses did not provide Rana with occasions to engage in authentic academic literacy practices. As a result, Fisher's IEP had not sufficiently primed this student for the rigor of the undergraduate courses she subsequently encountered.

The importance of situating EAP learning within an authentic context is further evidenced by the IEP courses that were identified by participants as being most useful in students' academic preparation. Student participants most appreciated the courses that provided the greatest amount of instruction on academic readiness skills and made explicit connections to the types of discourse that students would later encounter in their matriculated studies. Courses such as the Study Skills and Strategy course and the Listening to Lectures course seemed to be most valued by students because these courses included tasks and activities that allowed them to imagine themselves in a "real" university course. By providing them with more genuine interaction with an academic discourse community, the students in these courses were able to engage in legitimate peripheral participation and reflect on what it would be like to be a member of the

university community (Lave, 1991). Thus, the IEP courses that were most connected to the university community and, particularly, brokered students' entry into that community of practice were most appreciated by students (Wenger, 2000). The EAP curricular structure at this IEP can therefore be understood as a continuum of involvement with the university community of practice (See Figure 6).

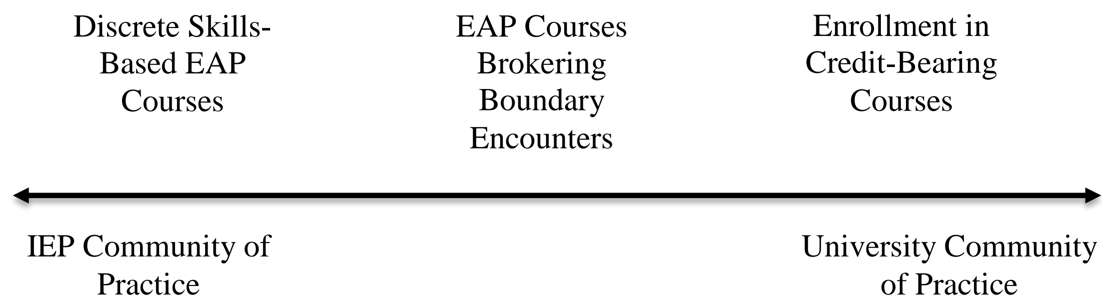


Figure 6. EAP Curricular Structure by Situation to University Community of Practice.

By viewing these courses in terms of their involvement with the university community of practice, we can see that the courses considered to be most effective were generally those that offered greater access to and engagement in authentic academic discourse community practices. In contrast, the IEP courses that were farther removed from the university community of practice and simply helped students learn discrete English language skills and/or study strategies were less appreciated by students (Hyland, 2016; Wenger, 2000, 2009).

In light of these findings, it appears that the current model of isolated skills-based EGAP instruction was not fully meeting the needs and expectations of academically bound international students at this university-based IEP. IEP instructors, such as Agata, expressed frustration in struggling to retain their students' attention in those EAP courses and claimed that many of their students "completely disregard their classes." It may have been because students had difficulty discerning the value of the skills and strategies offered through this instructional approach that these students in turn tended to ignore their IEP courses. In her discussion of this troubling student behavior, Agata called attention to the fact that "there is this complete disconnect" between students' focus on their college choice process and their neglect of their English language development in their EAP courses. In this observation, it seems that this instructor may have recognized the more widespread issue of students' dissatisfaction with the IEP's approach to EAP instruction. Students' inattention to their EAP courses is a vital issue that this IEP must work to remediate as most of these students will, in fact, need that English proficiency as soon as they matriculate into a degree program. The decontextualized nature of the study skills approach to EGAP instruction may be the root cause of this disconnect in students' understanding of their needs. Hence, university-based IEPs such as this one must consider the ways in which they can better facilitate students' academic socialization through their affiliation with the larger university community of practice.

Affiliation with the University Community

When examining the academic preparation that was occurring at Fisher University's IEP, the importance of students' participation beyond the IEP itself and within the larger university community of practice emerged. Participants from all three

groups expressed the need for students to gain increased access to and greater participation in the university community. Interestingly, the participation that many student participants desired was not social in nature. Instead, participants were most concerned with students' academic participation in, rather than their social engagement with, the greater university. This concern was related to the impact that students' limited opportunities for academic engagement in the larger university community of practice was thought to have had on students' academic readiness development. Accordingly, it is important to further discuss the influence that the IEP's affiliation with and position in the larger university community had on students' opportunities to participate in the university-wide academic engagement.

University-based IEPs have traditionally been known to stand at the periphery of the university (Thompson, 2013; Williams, 1995). When considering the IEP under investigation, it is important to remember that the IEP at Fisher University enjoyed a privileged position as compared to many other university-based IEPs. This was primarily a due to its physical location at the heart of the university's campus and students' access to certain university resources. Nevertheless, the ability of this IEP to fully approximate the university experience was limited due to the non-matriculated status granted to students enrolled in the program and the non-tenure track status of the IEP instructors. As a result, Fisher's IEP did experience the marginalization that has long been felt towards such ESL programs and it, in many respects, still maintained a fringe position within the university.

The IEP's marginalization within the university at large has important implications. In particular, such a limited affiliation with the university would make it

more difficult for this IEP to substantially alter its general skills-based approach to EAP instruction in favor of a more discipline-specific approach. One way that this IEP could address the need to incorporate greater specificity in its EAP instruction would be through university observations and credit-bearing courses. The findings from this study indicated that increasing students' access to enrollment in credit courses and incorporating more observations of university lectures into the IEP curriculum would provide students with important opportunities for boundary encounters with the university community of practice (Wenger, 2000). Likewise, when IEPs broker students' entry into the university by incorporating such boundary encounters into the program of study, they are providing these students with opportunities to engage in legitimate peripheral participation within the larger university community of practice (Lave 1991). By increasing its facilitation of student engagement in these university practices, this IEP would consequently develop a better affiliation with the university at large as these are not matters that the IEP can attend to on its own (See Figure 7).

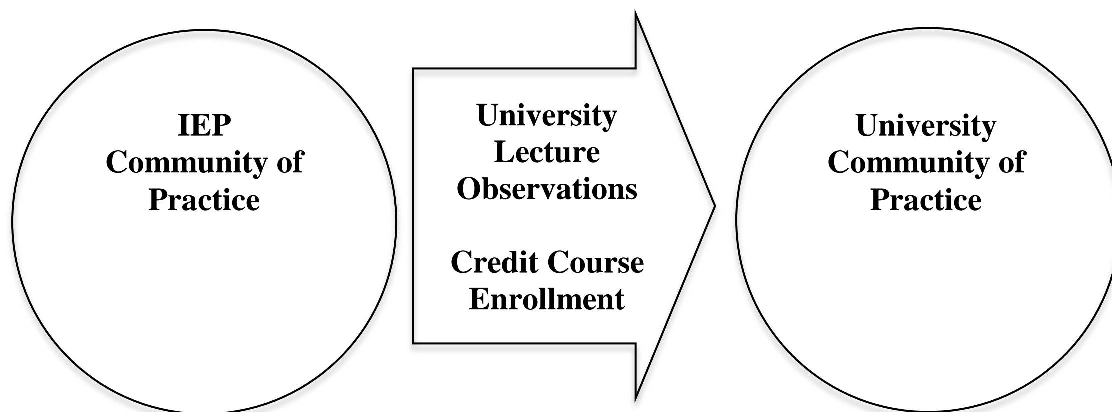


Figure 7. IEP Facilitation of Student Engagement in the University Community of Practice.

When viewing students' academic preparation through the construct of situated learning theory, it is easy to recognize the importance of the IEP's affiliation with the university community of practice. Many academically bound international students choose to enroll in university-based IEPs because they do not yet possess the language proficiency and/or college-going knowledge necessary to enroll directly in the undergraduate or graduate degree program of their choice. Such students are reliant on the IEP to support their academic and linguistic development in order to gain university admission and to help ease their adjustment to American academia. Studying at a university-based IEP should also have the inherent value of affording these students greater opportunities for involvement in the American university community of practice. IEPs can likewise play an important role in assisting students' academic socialization and their preparation for degree studies by facilitating students' involvement in the co-participatory social practice of shared learning in discipline-specific communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Observations of university lectures and enrollment in credit-bearing courses emerged from the data as two of the most prominent means of such IEP facilitated engagement in authentic academic discourse communities within the larger university community. These two means of facilitating student engagement with the university are discussed below.

Students enrolled in Fisher's IEP desired opportunities for authentic engagement within the university community of practice and the observations of university lectures were repeatedly highlighted by participants as the most prominent source of such academic participation. The student participants who had conducted a lecture observation attributed immense value to this activity. If we recall the description of the

lecture observation that was given by Alhusain, a former student who had matriculated into a master's program in engineering, he explained how helpful he had found the university lecture observation because it had been the first time that he witnessed a "real American class." Even though the observations that IEP students, such as Alhusain, had conducted were singular events that did not allow for continued membership in the classroom community, this opportunity to legitimately engage, albeit at the very edge of the periphery, in the collective social practice of the "real" university classroom was powerful for these students. Perhaps this activity so resonated with IEP students because it allowed them to begin to internalize their belonging to and identification with the American university community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 2009). Although research has suggested that EAP instruction should provide students with simulated academic lectures (Ferris & Tagg, 1996), such reproductions do not afford students with this type of legitimate interaction with the social world of the academic practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Despite the great value that students ascribed to their observation experience, participants reported that the one observation students completed as a course requirement was simply not sufficient. As a result, the suggestion was made to incorporate more observations of university course lectures into the IEP curriculum. Such a modification to the EAP curriculum would fulfill an unmet need at this IEP by facilitating greater participation in the university community of practice.

While conducting observations of university lectures gave students a taste of the "real" university classroom, the one-off nature of such observations prevented students from establishing continued membership in the classroom community of practice (Lave, 1991). In contrast, enrollment in a semester-long credit course could actually grant

students such community membership. Perhaps because of this more legitimate membership to a community of practice, the enrollment in a credit course was seen as an invaluable experience by those students who had been able to take advantage of the program option. In fact, all four of the student participants who had taken a credit course while enrolled at Fisher's IEP discussed the benefits of socializing in the university classroom that their enrollment in these courses afforded them. Recall how Khulood, an Omani student who was preparing for undergraduate admission, described the credit-bearing course she was taking: "It gives you the perspective and hint of what U.S. universities are like." By enrolling in credit courses, these IEP students were able to engage in situated negotiation of meaning with American classmates and professors within the academic discipline of their choosing. Such engagement in a discipline-specific collective social practice provided these students with the necessary context to situate their learning and acculturation to American academia (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is not surprising, then, that several participants suggested that it would be beneficial for this IEP to encourage greater participation in this credit course option. In particular, several students expressed a desire to enroll in more credit-bearing courses and also proposed lowering the prerequisite requirements for this program option so that students at lower levels in the IEP could be permitted to enroll in credit courses earlier in their studies. By making these modifications, this IEP would also be able to address the issue of discipline specificity by providing students with outlets to engage in field-specific academic discourse communities.

If university-based IEPs are to function as a site of academic socialization for academically bound international students, these organizations must provide their

students with access to and involvement in the American university community. The findings of this study reveal the importance of providing IEP students with opportunities to engage in the types of academic participation that allow them to “touch” the larger university community of practice. Such legitimate peripheral participation occurred at the IEP under investigation through the structured facilitation of observations of university lectures and the enrollment in credit-bearing courses. However, IEP facilitation of these types of activities requires a degree of affiliation within the larger community of practice that the marginalized status afforded to many university-based IEPs would not allow. Thus, university-based IEPs must strive to increase their affiliation with the larger university community to which they belong if these IEPs themselves are to be conceptualized as the context for legitimate peripheral participation in the university community for such academically bound international students.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion of Findings

In this dissertation, I have provided an examination of the ways in which an IEP was meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. Drawing upon situated learning theory, I analyzed the process of academic socialization that these students undertook as they engaged in the college-going process while studying at a university-based IEP. The findings of this study suggest that IEPs can play an integral role in supporting students' academic socialization by providing their students with opportunities for participation both inside and outside of the IEP classroom. Nonetheless, the IEP community of practice alone did not provide sufficient exposure to the "real" university experience and participants expressed dissatisfaction concerning students' limited academic participation in the larger university community. Hence, in order to situate students' learning and assist their acculturation into American academia (Lave & Wenger, 1991), IEPs should improve students' access to and academic involvement in the American university community.

For many academically bound international students, gaining admission to an American university was found to be their primary focus while studying at this IEP. Yet, we know very little about the ways in which the college choice support needs of these students differ from those of their American peers. Further, IEPs themselves often view students' needs associated with the applications and admissions process to be secondary to their role in supporting students' academic English preparation. In fact, the findings of

this study illuminated a discrepancy in the ways in which instructors and students perceived the function of the IEP. While instructors viewed their role as one of linguistic and academic readiness development, students were almost singularly concerned with the immediate needs associated with the applications and admissions process. Therefore, although the formal support structure offered by this IEP and particularly the one-on-one advising was perceived to be immensely valuable by the student participants, the instructors at this IEP were found to assume only a minimal role in supporting their students' college choice process.

In regards to how well this IEP was preparing its students for their transitions to matriculated degree studies, the discordant conceptualizations of students' needs and the function of the IEP in meeting those needs once again came to the forefront. Because students were so focused on the short-term goal of gaining university admission, instructors worried that these students were neglecting their general IEP courses to instead focus all of their attention on their applications and admissions processes. This discrepancy was perhaps exacerbated by this IEP's study skills approach to EAP instruction in which general language skills and learning strategies were largely presented outside of an authentic context (Hyland, 2006, 2016; Lea & Street, 2000). The IEP courses that were most frequently identified as being particularly useful in students' academic preparation were those that offered greater connections to the university community of practice. These courses provided explicit instruction on academic readiness skills that students could apply to authentic academic practices within disciplinary communities and brokered students' entry into the university community of practice through boundary encounters (Wenger, 2000). The fact that many IEP students

at Fisher University failed to recognize the value of their EAP courses indicates the need to reexamine this program's approach to EAP instruction. By addressing discipline-specificity in its EAP curricula and facilitating students' academic engagement in the university community of practice, this IEP may be better able to persuade its students of the role their IEP studies can play in helping them to achieve their long-term academic goals.

Prior to this study, there has been little, if any, published research on the ways in which IEPs at American universities support academically bound international students through the applications and admissions process, while simultaneously preparing these students for the demands of their degree programs. By providing an in-depth analysis of one university-based IEP, this dissertation has begun to fill this gap in knowledge. In particular, the findings offer insight into the types of program features that academically bound international students enrolled at IEPs found most useful and the ways in which these students believed such programs should function. In this way, the findings of this study challenge the notion that IEPs such as this one can simply deliver general English language instruction in isolation. Instead, IEPs must also provide their academically bound international students with college choice support and academic readiness skills. By doing so, these programs can better facilitate students' academic socialization and help these students achieve their academic goals. The implications and recommendations presented below offer concrete suggestions for the ways in which such IEPs can structure this type of support and preparation.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study offer a number of implications and recommendations for those involved in the preparation of academically bound international students within the context of IEPs. These implications can be understood thematically in terms of the two broad functions such IEPs must assume: (a) college choice support and (b) linguistic and academic readiness preparation.

College Choice Support

Academically bound international students attend IEPs with the explicit purpose of gaining admission to an undergraduate or graduate degree program. The findings of this study reveal that for such students, the IEP plays a vital role in providing the college choice support necessary to achieving that academic goal. Accordingly, such IEPs must ensure that they can offer their students the resources required to successfully navigate the university applications and admissions process. For the IEP under investigation in this study, such support was provided through the formal structure of test preparation and application support courses, open information sessions, and one-on-one advising sessions.

The findings indicate that although academically bound international students may come from privileged backgrounds, these students do not possess all of the types of "family capital" that is specifically useful to the American college choice process (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). As a result, the individualized advising support proved to be the essential source of support for the international students at Fisher's IEP who were completing the applications and admissions processes. Students' heavy reliance on institutional agents suggests that IEPs should provide their students with regular access to

one-on-one advising support. This advising should be offered by individuals who have specialized knowledge on the needs of this student population and can offer such students direct and individualized advice. Further, students benefitted from the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships with their advisors, and thus, IEPs should structure their advising support so that students are able to consistently meet with the same advisor throughout the college choice process.

Despite the value international students found in this individualized advising support, it is important for IEPs to recognize that students' reliance on advising support alone is not a sustainable program model. Instead, the results of this dissertation suggest that such programs should also establish alternative forms of college choice information dissemination. The fact that the open information sessions offered by this IEP were not more highly valued by the student participants indicates an opportunity for improvement to this program feature. The one-off nature of these sessions and their scripted, depersonalized approach seemed to be the reason for students' limited appreciation of these sessions. In response to these critiques, IEP administrators should consider other avenues for broadcasting college choice process information. One approach to convey this information would be through a series of workshops, which could provide students with a venue where they could regularly meet with a knowledgeable administrator or instructor. By revising the ways in which college choice process information is shared in this manner, students would also potentially benefit from shared learning with peers as they co-engaged in the college choice process (Lave, 1991).

Finally, instructors at IEPs that enroll large numbers of academically bound students must be encouraged to play an active role in their students' college choice

process. Unfortunately, many of the instructors at this IEP considered applications and admissions process support to be outside of their purview. This had a twofold effect: Students were not able to rely upon the IEP personnel with whom they had the most direct interaction for the college choice process information they so needed and the instructors failed to promote the college choice resources that were available to students through the program. At this IEP, instructors' disengagement from the college choice process represented a lost opportunity of support for these students. These findings illuminate the need for IEP instructors to be better informed about the college choice process and the formal support resources offered by their organization. By increasing their awareness of all that the application and admissions process entails, these instructors can serve as important advocates for the organizational resources available and become sources a college choice support themselves. Further, IEP administrators should encourage instructors to participate in the college choice process both inside and outside of the classroom. The nature of the IEP community had shifted in recent years and thus, the practice of this community must also shift in response to this change in student needs. When instructors recognize that IEPs serve the dual function of providing academic English instruction *and* college choice support, they can then reconceptualize the ways in which they support their students through the applications and admissions processes.

Linguistic and Academic Readiness Preparation

In addition to helping students navigate the college choice process, IEPs must also provide these students with the linguistic and academic skills necessary to succeed once they matriculate into their undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Although the former student participants did state that they felt generally prepared for their transitions

to matriculated studies, students' overall inattention to their English language development while studying at this IEP was a profound area of concern. While the student participants in this study expressed substantial appreciation of the college choice support they received during their studies at this IEP, they ascribed considerably less praise to their EAP courses. Accordingly, the current approach of skills-based EGAP instruction should be reconsidered as it did not appear to be sufficiently meeting the needs of the IEP's academically bound students. This finding brings the debate over discipline specificity (Horowitz, 1986; Hyland, 2002, 2016; Krause, 2014; Lea & Street, 2000; Spack, 1988, 1997) to the context of the university-based IEP and supports the argument for a more disciplinary approach to EAP instruction. In place of a skills-based approach, the findings from this dissertation suggest that university-based IEPs serving academically bound students should deliver courses that better situate language learning in the context of discipline-specific practices. Regrettably, there is no singular approach to such ESAP instruction that will work for all university-based IEPs. Instead, the form that this instruction takes will be dependent on the context of each IEP (i.e., the structure of the IEP's courses, the course curricula, the program's relationship with the larger university, etc.). Furthermore, it is important to remember the inherent difficulty associated with implementing an ESAP approach at an IEP due to the heterogeneity of the academic levels (i.e., undergraduate or graduate) and disciplines of the enrolled students. One way that a university-based IEP may be able to partly tackle this curricular challenge is in partnership with the larger university community. University-based IEPs are ideally situated to offer access to academic discourse communities from a wide variety of disciplines. Unfortunately, the marginalized status of many such IEPs

(Thompson, 2013; Williams, 1995) has limited the extent to which these programs and their students interact with the general university community of practice. However, some IEPs may be able to remedy this deficiency by expanding students' access to and involvement in authentic academic literacy practices within the university. The findings from this study have led me to propose two concrete initiatives that this IEP could implement in order to incorporate greater discipline specificity into its curriculum and increase students' engagement with university academic practices: (a) incorporating more university observations and (b) increasing access to credit-bearing courses.

In the first place, IEPs could incorporate more observations of university course lectures into their programs of study. Such observations can serve as an ethnographic exploration for these students, which have been found to help students increase their understandings of the practices specific to particular academic discourse communities (Johns, 1997). It is important to note that it is not enough to simply encourage their students to conduct these observations. Instead, the findings suggest that such observations should be embedded within the IEP curriculum and that IEP instructors must support their students in arranging these observations. At the IEP under investigation, only one university lecture observation was incorporated into the curriculum, which occurred as a course assignment for a listening elective that enrolled students in the 600 or 700 levels (i.e., CEFR B1+/B2-). However, I would argue that such observations should be initiated at lower proficiency levels (e.g., CEFR A2) and should continue throughout courses at each subsequent IEP level. Although students with lower levels of English proficiency may not be able to understand significant portions of university lectures, this outcome in itself is an important realization for these

students. As such, observing these classes would function as a valuable consciousness raising exercise for such students. By implementing this curricular enhancement, IEP students would be given greater opportunities for boundary encounters with the larger university community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000). Further, IEP instructors would be able to draw upon students' experiences in these observations and the discipline-specific content they encountered to better situate students' EAP instruction in authentic academic practices.

In regards to enrollment in credit-bearing courses, the IEP administration at Fisher University has maintained the long-held belief that only students at the very highest levels of proficiency were ready to take on the demands of such courses. After all, IEP instructors and administrators certainly do not want to see our students fail on their first foray into the "real" American university classroom. However, this attempt to better ensure IEP student success may actually be preventing students from gaining valuable academic skills that they need once they ultimately begin their undergraduate or graduate degree programs of study. Based on the perceptions of the student participants, the benefits attributed to opting into the credit course program, and the low student participation rates that have existed in the program, it would therefore be worth considering potentially lowering this proficiency level requirement and/or making this prerequisite more flexible. This change in the proficiency requirement could not be drastic, as the professors of the credit-bearing courses would likely be resistant to having students at much lower proficiency levels in their courses. However, even permitting students in their first session at the 800 level and potentially some 700-level students to take credit-bearing courses would expand the pool of eligible students dramatically. In

doing so, this IEP could facilitate the initial entry into authentic university courses for a much larger proportion of its students. With more students enrolled in discipline-specific credit courses, the IEP would then have the ability to redesign some of its EAP courses to integrate those students' lived experiences with discipline specificity in those courses. This could take the form of an expansion of the types of assignments and activities that have already been incorporated into the Study Skills and Strategies course, which allow students to reflect upon the classroom practices and pedagogies they encounter in these university courses. By drawing upon the students' experiences and academic literacies encountered in their credit-bearing courses, IEPs could provide their students with increased opportunities for situated learning within the context of discipline-specific collective social practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 2009).

In order to accomplish this academic initiative, university-based IEPs will need to increase their affiliation with the larger university community so that such programs would have the institutional relationships and capability to offer their students the opportunity to enroll in credit courses. However, this is not something that IEPs can accomplish by their own initiative. Instead, universities must work with IEPs to recognize the integral role that these programs can play in the recruitment and academic preparation of international students. In light of the tremendous economic and social impact that the international student population has on the American higher education system (IIE, 2016), universities themselves should move to better integrate IEPs and their students into the general university community of practice. Such a shift may also have the coinciding benefit of helping to alleviate the marginalized status that students enrolled in university-based IEPs have historically experienced (Thompson, 2013; Williams,

1995). By participating in credit-bearing courses, academically bound international students will have increased opportunities for authentic academic engagement with American students. Further, by facilitating such legitimate peripheral participation in the university classroom, IEPs will, in turn, provide their students with the chance to experience a greater sense of identity and belonging within the university community of practice (Lave, 1991). The aforementioned implications suggest tangible avenues that IEPs should explore when examining the ways in which they can best support their students' linguistic and academic skill development for ultimate success in subsequent degree programs.

Limitations

Despite the important implications that this study provides for IEP instructors and administrators concerned with supporting their academically bound students, there are several methodological and theoretical limitations that should likewise be acknowledged. First and foremost, my sampling of student participants was limited due to a variety of factors. I had initially planned to utilize stratified random sampling to increase confidence and add credibility to the sample of the student participants (Patton, 2002). However, this sampling method did not result in sufficient response rates from newly arrived students with lower levels of English proficiency or from students who had been formerly enrolled in Fisher's IEP. This sampling issue partially resolved itself when I realized that the intended research design had artificially divided the current students into unnatural categories. I thus took advantage of the flexibility of emergent design by merging the first and second subgroups into one. However, to remedy the inadequate response rate from former students, it was necessary to alter the sampling and recruitment

approach to instead employ purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). More specifically, rather than recruiting from a randomly selected list of former students, I reached out to Lauren, the University Preparation Advising Specialist, who provided me with a list of 20 former students who she thought would be more likely to respond to my request to participate in an interview. Through the persistent recruitment of this student list, I was ultimately able to interview five former student participants. In addition, I also decided to purposefully sample several current students who had taken advantage of the credit course option because initial interviews had identified this program feature as being particularly valuable in supporting students' academic preparation.

Although the use of purposeful sampling in this study was a practical and worthwhile approach that allowed me to identify a few information-rich, illuminative cases for study (Patton, 2002), there were also limitations associated with this sampling method. Originally, I had intended to interview a range of former students including those who had successfully matriculated into degree programs and those who had instead pursued alternate academic paths (e.g., returning to their home countries for further study, enrolling in a community college, etc.). However, I was unable to recruit any former students who fell into the latter category and as a result, the former students who accepted my invitation to participate in this study materialized as successful students who expressed generally positive opinions of Fisher's IEP. Consequently, the perspectives conveyed by these five former student participants may not be entirely representative of the general student body at Fisher's IEP. Even with the randomly sampled current student participants, it seemed that students' willingness to respond to my request to

participate in an interview may have been indicative of the fact that these students were, perhaps, more enthusiastic and agreeable than the average student at Fisher's IEP.

In addition to the limitations associated with the sampling of student participants, the impact of my position at Fisher's IEP must also be considered. Being both a program administrator at the IEP under investigation and a researcher conducting the data collection for this study resulted in both challenges and benefits. In terms of limitations, I had to constantly be aware of the influence my positioning within the organization may have had on the data collection and analysis. For example, instructors' and administrators' willingness to participate in this study was likely influenced by my position in the organization, as all of those who were recruited agreed to participate. Additionally, some of the instructor and administrator participants may have been less candid in their criticism of certain program features than they would have been had the research been conducted by an outside scholar. Nevertheless, my positioning within the IEP did also have considerable advantages as it afforded me greater access to participants, internal data, institutional knowledge, and the historical context of the organization.

Finally, there is also a theoretical limitation to consider in regards to my stance on the inherent necessity of English language proficiency itself. As a TESOL researcher and language program administrator, I am perhaps overly concerned with the role that language plays in international students' ability to perform in academic discourse communities. Throughout my analysis of these data, I have held the assumption that the students under investigation required a certain level of English language proficiency if they were to become successful in their degree programs. However, this underlying

assumption has been challenged by some researchers who have found that the importance of linguistic competence by its very nature can vary across disciplines (Chang & Kanno, 2010). Although this dissertation has acknowledged the importance of specificity in the ways in which students' academic needs are theorized, a more comprehensive investigation should consider the impact of language competence on international students at a variety of academic levels and disciplines.

Suggestions for Future Research

In recent years, IEPs have increasingly functioned as intermediary sites of learning that assist academically bound international students in gaining admission to matriculated degree programs at American universities (Basturkmen, 2009; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015). Despite the fact that many IEPs have shifted their instructional focus in an attempt to provide their students with the academic preparation and college-going support necessary in this role, there exists a gap in the literature on this issue. Research has yet to thoroughly investigate the changing needs of this specific population of students, nor have researchers examined the ways in which these IEPs are actually supporting students in their pursuit of admission to and enrollment in American universities. The results of this dissertation suggest that considerable questions remain about the ways in which IEPs can best assist academically bound students. Therefore, more research on the paths of academically bound international students within the context of university-based IEPs must be conducted.

In this dissertation, I discovered that the formal college choice support structure offered by an IEP can provide academically bound international students with valuable and necessary information and resources to assist them through the completion of

university applications and admissions. However, little is known about the various approaches that different IEPs have taken to providing this support. As such, future studies should survey the types of college choice support that university-based IEPs are currently offering their academically bound students. In exploring the current approaches to this support, researchers must also examine how international students' needs differ from those of immigrant or American students when it comes to engagement in the applications and admissions processes. Moreover, the divergent needs of international students applying to programs at different academic levels (i.e., undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs) must be studied in order to provide IEPs with specific recommendations on the distinct college choice support that they should offer students at each academic stage.

In addition to the findings concerning the college choice process, this dissertation also calls into question the ways in which such IEPs approach EAP instruction. The extant literature has failed to situate the debate over EAP methodologies within the context of university-based IEPs with heterogeneous student populations pursuing degrees from diverse disciplines. Further, IEP administrators possess a limited understanding of the EAP methods that other IEPs have implemented in attempting to support such academically bound international students. This absence of mutual discussion among IEPs is particularly concerning due to the fact that such IEPs have shared the experience of this general transition in their role in supporting academically bound students. Accordingly, IEP administrators could greatly benefit from an increased understanding of the ways in which IEPs at peer institutions have successfully responded to this demographic shift. Future research should therefore include large-scale studies of

the various approaches that university-based IEPs are currently employing in their EAP instruction. Moreover, future studies should explore the ways in which IEPs with heterogeneous populations of students can address the issue of discipline specificity in their EAP instruction. As alluded to previously, researchers should further investigate the primacy of language proficiency across various academic discipline communities and at the different stages of academic study. Such research will be invaluable to IEPs who are attempting to move beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to their EAP instruction.

Lastly, additional research is needed to more thoroughly investigate the extent to which IEPs have actually prepared international students for their transition into various matriculated degree programs and for their ultimate academic success. Adequately addressing this research question within the confines of this study was a challenge, as I had neither the time nor resources necessary to conduct a longitudinal study in which I could monitor students' progress from their original entry in the IEP through their ultimate degree completion. Accordingly, future research should employ a longitudinal approach to the investigation of this issue by following academically bound international students for the duration of their academic journeys.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this dissertation suggest that international students' perceptions of university-based IEPs have shifted considerably. Academically bound students no longer need these programs to function solely as channels of English language support. Rather, these students now expect IEPs to also serve as college-going support and academic readiness programs that will bridge them to their degree studies. Accordingly, these results suggest the need for a reconceptualization of the nature and status of the

university-based IEP. In order to sufficiently prepare its students for subsequent academic studies, an IEP cannot maintain a marginalized role at the periphery of the university. Instead, university-based IEPs need to look beyond their borders and identify ways to exploit their affiliation with the university at large. Conversely, the larger university administration must also consider the ways in which they can better support international students studying at their IEPs, as these students offer a valuable source of international enrollments. Such a reconceptualization of student support will be challenging for many IEP administrators and instructors to accept, as these professionals have sustained long-held beliefs about the primacy of language in the support they offer their students. Nevertheless, university-based IEPs must address this inherent conflict between English language instruction and college-going support if they are to be able to adequately meet their students' needs and expectations. In closing, I am reminded of the contemplations of Evan, the University Preparation Program Counseling Specialist:

> I think that the big questions that we touched on are—we are an English language program. Could we do other things? Absolutely. . . . I think it is that sort of question—where is that line where the IEP, the English side of the IEP and the academic side of helping students transition academically. . . . I think that would be the biggest question of what is our mission. We want to serve our students, but how does our mission potentially conflict with what will be best for them?

Evan, who was the only administrator without a degree in TESOL, reflected on this issue most astutely perhaps, in part, due to his distance from the field of TESOL. When thinking about the direction university-based IEPs should move in the coming years, we should take a cue from Evan and remember to always concentrate on what will be best for our students.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: CURRENT STUDENTS

a. BACKGROUND

Brief introduction to the purpose of the study:

1. Where are you from?
2. What language(s) do you speak?
3. What education (degrees) have you completed prior to arriving at the IEP?
4. What colleges/universities have you attended?
5. When did you arrive at the IEP?
6. Is this your first time studying abroad?
7. What levels and/or classes have you taken at the IEP?
8. What standardized/entrance exams (TOEFL, SAT, etc.) have you taken?
9. When did you take each exam and what scores did you receive?

b. EXPECTATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your academic goals.

1. Why did you decide to come to the IEP to study English?
2. What are your short-term goals over next 6 months to a year?
3. What are your long-term goals in the next five years?
4. What programs do you plan to/did you apply to?
5. How do you think the IEP can help you to achieve those goals?
6. Why do you want to attend a degree program in the United States?

7. What are the benefits to getting your degree in the States over your native country or another country?

8. What are the disadvantages to getting your degree in the States over your native country or another country?

9. Who is paying for your studies now?

10. Will that person/sponsor pay for your entire degree program?

11. (Sponsored/scholarship students) What regulations and requirements does your scholarship have?

12. What is your timeline for applying to and starting a program of study?

13. Is this the same timeline that you had prior to arriving at the IEP?

14. Has it taken you more or less time than you originally thought to prepare for university applications and admission?

15. Have you participated in IEP social activities? If so, did you find them helpful?

16. Have you participated in university sponsored social activities? If so, did you find them helpful? What are the benefits of participating in these activities?

17. Do you hang out with IEP students outside of class? Do you hang out with other students from the university? If yes, are they American or international?

18. Are you more or less involved in the university community than you expected?

c. ACADEMIC PREPARATION & CHALLENGES

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your experience here at the IEP and the challenges you have faced so far.

1. Describe your overall experience with the university applications and admissions process.

2. Above you said that you want to attend _______. Can you tell me what you need to do to apply and gain acceptance to that program/university?

3. What challenges have you faced since arriving at the IEP?

4. How helpful have your IEP classes been in preparing you for your undergrad/graduate degree studies?

5. What courses have you found to be particularly useful in preparing for your studies?

6. What courses have you found to be particularly unhelpful in preparing for your studies?

7. When will you be ready to submit your application(s)? Is there anything holding up your application(s)?

8. What skills and knowledge do you still need to develop before you are ready to apply for your university program?

9. Have you taken advantage of any of the following:

    a. University Preparation advising?

    b. University Preparation classes?

    c. University Preparation workshops?

    d. College fairs?

10. Why have you/have you not taken advantage of any of the University Preparation resources?

11. How helpful have the above resources been?

12. Are there any resources that the IEP could provide you with to help you in the applications and admissions processes?

13. What questions do you have about applying to, selecting, and enrolling in a degree program?

c. CONCLUSION

Ok, a few more questions:

1. In general, how satisfied have you been with your experience at the IEP?

2. How well prepared do you think you are to succeed in the academic program of your choice?

3. As I said before, this is a study about how the IEP is meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: FORMER STUDENTS

a. BACKGROUND

Brief introduction to the purpose of the study:

1. Where are you from?
2. What language(s) do you speak?
3. What education (degrees) have you completed prior to arriving at the IEP?
4. What colleges/universities have you attended?
5. When did you arrive at the IEP? When did you begin your degree program?
6. Was this your first time studying abroad?
7. What levels and/or classes did you take at the IEP?
8. What standardized/entrance exams (TOEFL, SAT, etc.) did you take?
9. When did you take each exam and what scores did you receive?
10. Where are you studying now?
11. What degree/major are you pursuing?
12. When did you begin the program? When do you expect to finish?

b. EXPECTATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your academic goals.

1. Why did you decide to come to the IEP to study English?
2. What were your short term goals when you can to the IEP?
3. What are your long-term goals in the next five years?
4. What programs did you apply to?

5. How do you think the IEP helped you to achieve your goals?
6. Why did you decide to attend a degree program in the United States?
7. What are the benefits to getting your degree in the States over your native country or another country?
8. What are the disadvantages to getting your degree in the States over your native country or another country?
9. Who is paying for your studies now?
10. Will that person/sponsor pay for your entire degree program?
11. (Sponsored/scholarship students) What regulations and requirements does your scholarship have?
12. Did you take you more or less time than you originally thought to prepare for university applications and admission?
13. Did you participate in IEP social activities? If so, did you find them helpful?
14. Have you participated in university sponsored social activities? If so, did you find them helpful? What are the benefits of participating in these activities?
15. Who do you hang out with outside of class? Do you hang out with other students from the university? If yes, are they American or international?
16. Are you more or less involved in the university community than you expected?

c. ACADEMIC PREPARATION & CHALLENGES

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your experience at the IEP and the challenges you have faced so far.

1. Describe your overall experience with the university applications and admissions process.
2. What challenges did you face at the IEP? In your degree program?
3. How helpful do you think your IEP classes were in preparing you for your undergrad/graduate degree studies?
4. What courses do you think were particularly useful in preparing for your studies?

5. What courses do you think were particularly unhelpful in preparing for your studies?

6. Did you take advantage of any of the following:

    a. University Preparation advising?

    b. University Preparation classes?

    c. University Preparation workshops?

    d. College fairs?

7. Why?

8. How helpful were the above resources?

9. Are there any resources that the IEP could have provided you with to help you in the applications and admissions processes or to prepare you for your degree program?

c. CONCLUSION

Ok, a few more questions:

1. In general, how satisfied have you been with your experience at the IEP?

2. How well do you think the IEP prepared you to succeed in your academic program?

3. As I said before, this is a study about how the IEP is meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: INSTRUCTORS

a. BACKGROUND

Brief introduction to the purpose of the study:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. When did you start teaching at the IEP?
3. What courses do you currently teach?
4. What other courses have you taught in the past?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. What colleges/universities have you attended?
7. Do you speak any languages other than English?
8. Where have you previously taught? What types of schools/programs?

b. EXPERIENCES

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your experience with university bound students.

1. What percent of your current students do you think are academically bound? Undergrad? Grad?
2. Do most of your students express their academic aspirations to you? How do you collect this information?
3. How realistic do students' aspirations seem to you?
4. What are some of the largest issues you encounter with students as they prepare to apply for university?
5. What do you do to try to help prepare students for their academic studies?

6. How effective do you think the IEP courses are in giving students the language and skills necessary for the university classroom?
7. What courses are particularly successful in preparing students for academic coursework?
8. What courses are particularly unsuccessful in preparing students for academic coursework?
9. How could current courses be revised to better fit the needs of IEP students?
10. What courses should be added to the IEP curriculum to help prepare students for university study?
11. What do you view as your role in assisting academically bound students?
12. Is there anything that you do in your instruction that is particularly related to assisting students with their applications or the admissions process?
13. Are you familiar with the University Preparation resources that are available to students?
14. Do your students ever ask you about these resources and/or do you refer your students to these resources?
15. Are there particular factors that you have noticed which make students particularly successful at navigating the applications and admissions process?
16. Is there anything in particular that you think the IEP could do to better prepare these students for the applications and admissions process?

c. CONCLUSION

Ok, a few more questions:

1. In general, what has been your experience with helping students with the applications and admissions process?
2. How well prepared do you think most students are when they transition from the IEP to the academic program of your choice?
3. As I said before, this is a study about how the IEP is meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: ADMINISTRATORS

a. BACKGROUND

Brief introduction to the purpose of the study:

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. What is your title and basic description of your position?
3. Do you also teach? If so, when did you start teaching at the IEP?
4. What courses do you currently teach?
5. What other courses have you taught in the past?
6. What is your highest level of education?
7. What colleges/universities have you attended?
8. Do you speak any languages other than English? If so, how did you learn these languages?
9. Where have you previously taught? What types of schools?
10. Where have you previously served as an administrator?

b. EXPERIENCES

OK, in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you about your experience with university bound students.

1. What percent of your current students do you think are academically bound? Undergrad? Grad?
2. Do most of your students express their academic aspirations to you? How do you collect this information?
3. How realistic do students' aspirations seem to you?

4. What are some of the largest issues you encounter with students as they prepare to apply for university?
5. What do you do to try to help prepare students for their academic studies?
6. How effective do you think the IEP courses are in giving students the language and skills necessary for the university classroom?
7. What courses are particularly successful in preparing students for academic coursework?
8. What courses are particularly unsuccessful in preparing students for academic coursework?
9. How could current courses be revised to better fit the needs of IEP students?
10. What courses should be added to the IEP curriculum to help prepare students for university study?
11. What support services should be added to the IEP to help prepare students make a transition to university?
12. What do you view as your role in assisting academically bound students?
13. Is there anything that you do that you think is particularly effective in assisting students with their applications or the admissions process?
14. What resources do you provide for students during the applications and admissions process?
15. How do most students find out about these resources?
16. Do you conduct one-on-one advising sessions with students?
17. If so, what do you generally discuss during these sessions?
18. How many times do most students attend advising sessions?
19. Are there specific factors that you have noticed which make students particularly successful at navigating the applications and admissions process?
20. Are there specific factors that you have noticed which make students particularly unsuccessful at navigating the applications and admissions process?
21. Is there anything in particular that you think the IEP could do to better prepare these students for the applications and admissions process?

c. CONCLUSION

Ok, a few more questions:

1. In general, what has been your experience with helping students with the applications and admissions process?

2. How well prepared do you think most students are when they transition from the IEP to the academic program of your choice?

3. As I said before, this is a study about how the IEP is meeting the needs of its academically bound international students. Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

TEMPLATE FOR EMAIL REQUEST FOR LECTURE VISIT

Date: Wednesday, November 3, 2015
From: (your email address)
To: (the professor's email address)
Subject: Request to observe your class (be sure to put a subject line!)

Dear Professor ________________:

I am an international student studying English as a Second Language at the Intensive English Program at Fisher University. I am currently taking the class "Listening to Lectures" to prepare for academic study in the US. One of the assignments for this class is to attend a lecture in order to practice my listening and note-taking skills. Would it be possible for me to sit in on your class in (name of class) either (day) or (day) of next week? I will arrive promptly and introduce myself to you before the start of class.

If you wish further details about this, please contact my teacher, (teacher's name) at the IEP, (teacher's email). Thank you for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely, (Give your full name)